

**LINKING TEXTS WITH CONTEXTS: THE CRITICAL FORM AND
FUNCTION OF PREACHING ON SOCIAL ISSUES—
A HOMILETICAL METHODOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

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by

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The final document is designed to create a homiletical methodology for Preaching on Social Issues. It was structured and taught as a graduate-level theological course for seminarians, graduate students, and ministerial practitioners. The one semester, thirteen-week course offering consisted of lectures, discussions and case studies. Class participants selected a social issue and a biblical text; developed a major project out of which a social issue sermon emerged. Results of the model were evaluated through the regular seminary instruments and demonstrated that such a homiletical methodology is vitally necessary. An edited version of the model is preserved on audio and videotapes.

PREFACE

The Birth of an Idea

"Preaching ought to empower people to do something about their circumstance in this world." Almost since I began in the preaching ministry, this has been the resounding refrain of my preaching ministry. While I believe, wholeheartedly, that preaching at its best reconciles men and women with God, I believe further that the way this reconciliation is accomplished is through preaching that addresses the specific social needs of the person and society. I find that this is what Jesus did. Over and over in the synoptic gospels and in the gospel of John, Jesus addressed and responded to the needs of the people and society as a part of entry to personal redemption and salvation. Throughout my preaching tenure, this belief has been fostered and supported by many persons who have served as my preaching paradigms, notable among which have been the late Martin Luther King, Jr.; Charles Gilchrist Adams, pastor of the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan; and James A. Forbes, senior pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City.

For me, the commitment to preaching on social issues was planted many years ago. While I was a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Professor James A. Forbes, then the Joe R. Engle Professor of Preaching, invited

William Sloane Coffin, his predecessor at the Riverside Church, to address our "Introduction to Preaching" class. At the conclusion of the lecture, I asked Dr. Coffin what he really expected to happen when he preached? His answer provided the evolution of my commitment to addressing social issues through biblical issues, and thus planted the seed for this project. Dr. Coffin said, if he preached a sermon on "beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruninghooks," he expected to see the persons listening to that sermon literally going into the streets and doing just that. Dr. Coffin further stated that he believed in the power of the message of the sermon to alter events, situations and circumstances in this world.

At the heart of this idea is the almost unrelenting belief that preaching on social issues is the missing ingredient in relevant powerful sermons today. When pastors and preachers pound their desks through the week because they realize that their sermons are unimaginative and lacking in interest, they need to consider preaching where the people are. The people who position themselves in the pews of this nation's church Sunday after Sunday are confronted daily with the harsh realities of a world spinning rapidly and radically out of control. In the face of homelessness, high unemployment and underemployment, a burgeoning violent crime rate, the resurgence of racism and sexism, an HIV/AIDS pandemic, a drug epidemic and an impotent and insensitive government, churchgoers want to and need to hear sermons that assure them that God is involved specifically in the day-to-day activities of humankind.

In January of 1989, I was invited to be the permanent part-time visiting assistant professor of Homiletics at my alma mater, Union Theological Seminary. Although I had served as an adjunct professor at New York Theological Seminary some years before, this new position afforded me the opportunity to develop a preaching pedagogy and homiletical methodology for preaching on social issues. In addition to teaching the core preaching course, "Introduction to Preaching," I was able to develop two courses of special interest to me, "Linking Texts with Contexts" and "Preaching As Social Commentary." In August of 1995, I became assistant professor of Homiletics at Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia, and again taught the course "Preaching As Social Commentary." In both teaching environments, the interest in the courses was extremely enthusiastic and attracted students working toward the Master of Divinity degree and the Ph.D. degree at Union, and students working toward the Master of Divinity, the Master of Arts and the Doctor of Ministry degrees at ITC.

While the course work at Union proceeded with excitement and enthusiasm, it was at ITC that the seed planted for preaching on social issues during my student days came to fruition. The students at ITC, most of whom are already actively involved in parish ministry, were very anxious to unleash this homiletical methodology in pulpits throughout Atlanta. This very hands-on application of the Gospel message helped to stimulate and structure the classroom atmosphere.

Since preaching on social issues does not happen automatically, this project was designed to create a homiletical methodology for structuring and developing a sermon on social issues. Rather than dealing with theory alone, this course was developed and designed to be taught at the seminary and graduate school level. The intent of this project is to establish the relevancy and the method for preaching on social issues. Further, it is intended to provide seminarians, ministerial practitioners and active preachers and pastors with resources, tools and techniques for addressing the crucial needs of this day through the sermonic event.

Take it from me, Someday we'll all be free!

—Donny Hathaway, singer

CHAPTER I

NEEDS AND CONTEXTUAL ASSESSMENT

And seek the peace of the City, where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

Jeremiah 29:7 NKJV

Statement of Need

As the Christian church braces itself for the arrival of the twenty-first century, there is good news and bad news. The good news is this: there is a renewed interest in the church and in preaching. The bad news is this: the demand for relevant, needs- meeting, issue-addressing preaching has never been greater. In a world like this, people are returning to the church with a sense of expectancy that the men and women who have emerged from the community of faith and taken a place in the pulpit, do in fact have a word from the Lord that will speak specifically to the need and issues of society in their generation. Many and varied are the social issues that confront the elderly, men and women, the baby boomers and busters, generation X, gays and lesbians, the disabled and physically challenged, and youth and children. Is there a word from the Lord? Is there no balm in Gilead? I believe that there is. The word from the Lord and the balm in Gilead can be found in biblical sermons that are targeted towards addressing social issues.

Many years ago I read this statement, "When there is a strong pulpit, there is a strong society." Even though the name of the person who made this statement has escaped my memory, it still impacts the very high view that I hold of preaching. I am greatly encouraged by the revival of biblical preaching that is sweeping this country. *Time Magazine* and others have documented in cover stories the return of the "baby-boomer" generation to houses of worship in this land. They are returning to churches and synagogues expecting to hear something from the rabbi, minister and priest that will speak specifically and concretely to their circumstances. They want to know what God is doing in their world and how they should respond.

There is a great need now and in the future for men and women who preach to deliver relevant sermons from their pulpits. It is the responsibility of seminaries and Bible colleges to see that their students are equipped and prepared to preach such sermons. Initially, I set out to develop a homiletical method, an approach to developing and designing sermons that deal with contemporary social issues. I began with the firm belief that sermons, in addition to providing a way of salvation, wholeness and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, hold some social significance if they are to be relevant to the listener. I have always believed that preaching is essentially a redemptive activity. In the very act of preaching, God encounters, probes, and challenges the human spirit. Preaching is one of God's methods of saving the world. Preaching is also a transformative activity. God uses

preaching as an avenue through which lives, and thereby the world, can be changed for the better.

Preaching is also a theological act. In this way, preaching is an activity that involves God in the day-to-day affairs of humanity. Preaching is that activity which links Christianity to the concrete. Ronald J. Sider and Michael A. King, in *Preaching About Life in a Threatening World*, demonstrate the theological dimension of preaching. We are reminded, "...salvation is not just a spiritual or otherworldly reality. It has radical implications for this real and desperate world, a world in which the poor and hungry and tortured need more than salvation from their personal sin, though they need that too."¹ Further, Christine M. Smith, in *Preaching As Weeping, Confessing and Resistance*, makes the case for preaching as a theological act:

Preaching is a theological act. A vital preaching ministry includes the skills of the sophisticated communicator, the attentiveness of the biblical exegete, the social analyses of the most discerning sociologist, but first and foremost it is the craft and act of a working theologian. It is a theological act because preachers are called to reflect upon, and struggle with, ultimate religious questions in life.²

Smith presses her claim that preaching is a theological act when she says, "Preaching

¹Ronald J. Sider and Michael King, *Preaching About Life in a Threatening World* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 12.

²Christine M. Smith, *Preaching As Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 1.

is an act of public theological naming. It is an act of disclosing and articulating the truths about our present human existence.³

This project was designed to enable present and future preachers and theological educators to identify some of the most pressing social issues of our day, reflect upon these issues from a biblical, theological and sociological vantage point, and attempt to preach a sermon from their chosen social issues.

Project Needs Assessment

Karl Barth, that great theologian of the twentieth century, is often quoted as saying that "every preacher should prepare sermons with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." I am sure that if Professor Barth were alive in the high-tech environment of the 1990s, he would suggest that Cable News Network (CNN) and "Headline News" be included in every preacher's study. This suggestion would not be hard to receive because we live an age where the rapidly changing scenario of our nation and the world make it necessary for the preacher to have almost instantaneous information at his or her disposal. The preacher, like everyone else, is bombarded with ongoing updates of current events that are happening in other parts of the world. As preachers sit in their study, awaiting a visit from the Holy Spirit, the world changes right before their very eyes. On any given day, issues of global war, homelessness, violence, homophobia, women's rights, HIV and AIDS

³Ibid., 2.

flash across our television screen. The way these events are brought on an hourly basis into our studies makes them impossible to ignore, as we prepare for Sunday's sermon.

With the understanding that God is actively involved in the events of the world, and the conviction that the Word of God gives us a mandate for appropriate action and response to such events, I wanted to teach a graduate-level preaching course during my time at Union Seminary and Interdenominational Theological Center that would enable seminarians and experienced practitioners to design, develop and deliver sermons that deal with contemporary social issues. I also wanted to help the preachers see the need for linking ancient biblical texts with these issues in such a way that the hearers of these sermons would have a clear understanding of what God is saying and doing in the world, and that their active response in the world would be consistent with the claims of God as found in the Scriptures. In order to do this, a methodology was needed to reach what Thomas H. Troeger calls, "the landscape of the heart."

In *Preaching As a Social Act*, Troeger says that the problem with most preaching is that, "Sermons sound like nothing more than another editorial, worthy perhaps of a responsible citizen's reflection, but never sending lightning and thun-

der over the landscape of the heart."⁴ Troeger makes the following suggestion for preaching on social issues: "In the face of such a profound spiritual crisis, the task of homiletics is to revitalize the religious imagination so that it creates a sense of open space in front of people, thereby giving them enough hope to work for social change."⁵

With these statements in mind, when designing this project, I specifically set out to do the following:

1. To get the student preachers to see the importance, necessity and relevance of preaching on contemporary social issues;
2. To establish the importance of developing biblical sermons that address the contemporary social issues of our day; to challenge the listening audience/congregation to respond and act in a manner consistent with the Word of God;
3. To develop a classroom pedagogy consistent with the course objectives;
4. To develop a learning environment in the classroom where the student preacher would feel comfortable on those contemporary social issues that are important to him or her, in such a way that the finished sermon would be delivered with integrity and passion;
5. To develop a sermon methodology that would facilitate preaching on contemporary social issues;
6. To get student preachers to explore, examine, and exegete a contemporary social issue of personal interest to them from a biblical, theological, and social perspective, present a paper on the issue out of which a sermon is developed; and

⁴Thomas H. Troeger, "The Power of Myth As a Key to Preaching on Social Issues," in *Preaching As a Social Act: Theology and Practice*, ed. Arthur Van Seters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 211.

⁵*Ibid.*, 212.

7. To examine sermon and preaching typologies, i. e., African-American, Feminist and Womanist, and Liberation, that routinely focus on contemporary social issues.

The purpose of these classes was to encourage student preachers to prepare and develop sermons that had as their specific intent the addressing of social issues that affect the listeners in the pews. We wanted to design sermons that would use ancient biblical texts to address the issues of modern society. We began this class with the positive belief that people still want to hear good, relevant sermons. But we also began with the strong notion that people want to hear sermons that meet them at the point of their deepest need. People want to hear sermons that speak in a particular way to a particular people in a particular situation.

The purpose of the project was to allow student preachers to gather information about their issue of interest. Several factors needed to be considered. First of all, the student preacher had to give a rationale for choosing the particular issue. In other words, why is this issue important to me, and will it be important to the listening congregation? What makes this issue one of importance at this particular time in the life of the church? Are there any biblical parallels that will help the project and/or the sermon? Secondly, the student preachers needed to "face the issue." In other words, what were their personal presuppositions, prejudices, biases that they currently held regarding this issue? What factors in their personal experiences caused them to feel the way that they did, e. g., family background, geographical location, economical, educational, theological, social and political? Could they deal objectively with the subject matter? What were the

experts or so-called experts saying about this subject? What was the opinion in the marketplace? What was the Word of God saying directly or indirectly? The project was to give the student preachers an opportunity to present a theological and sociological presentation about their issue, and then preach a sermon on the issue that would lead the hearers to action.

Preaching makes sense as the listener/audience comes to understand and know God's involvement in light of their existential reality. It is one thing for people to hear sermons that address grand themes of faith, hope and love. It is quite a different story to hear those same themes addressed in the light of an HIV/AIDS epidemic and against the backdrop of racism, sexism and economic recession. What is God saying about the issues that face a people on the brink of the twenty-first century? How is the preacher to give an impartial, objective exegesis of biblical texts that will help the listeners understand God's action in their world? Samuel D. Proctor, writing in *Preaching About Crisis in the Community*, provides the answer to these questions:

The preacher has the unique responsibility to stand tall in the midst of our moral confusion, our spiritual estrangement, and our lost opportunities and to declare that God is with us in our situation. News commentators, columnists, analysts, and television anchor people may make plain what our condition is, with meticulous detail and fastidious accuracy, but no one except the preacher is expected to proclaim that above, around, beneath and throughout this deep, dark morass lies the pervasive purpose of a loving and caring God.⁶

⁶Samuel D. Proctor, *Preaching About Crisis in the Community* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 11.

Contextual Assessment

The context for this project is Union Theological Seminary in New York City and Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia. The intellectual and cultural diversity of these contexts gives a broader dimension to preaching on social issues.

In January of 1990, I was asked to serve as the permanent part-time visiting assistant professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. For me, this three-year appointment was a very esteemed honor for two reasons. First of all, I received the Master of Divinity and Master of Sacred Theology degrees at Union in the early eighties; therefore to join with some of the same faculty members who had been my professors was a great opportunity. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, this teaching position would afford me the opportunity to test some long-held presuppositions about the art and craft of preaching. Among those presuppositions is the belief that preaching is a very practical discipline. While I am certain that some will disagree with me, I believe that every sermon should be constructed and designed with the intention of addressing some contemporary social issue, and affecting change in the thinking and action of the listener. For me, there is no evangelism without social justice. Further, I believe that sermons are vehicles to critically motivate the listener to hear God's word afresh and so respond in a way in the world that reflects God's intended purpose for individuals and society.

Founded in 1836, Union Theological Seminary is an independent, non-denominational graduate school of theology located on the edge of New York's Harlem community. Overlooking one of the world's largest urban contexts, Union is constantly reminded of its mission to "educate men and women for ministries in the Christian faith, service in contemporary society, and study of the great issues of our times."⁷ The group of Presbyterian laity and clergy that founded Union Seminary had in mind that Union would provide sound theological training on par with law and medical training. Union's library is one of the finest in the theological world. Faculty members have national and international reputations. Students enrolled in Union's eleven-degree programs come from all over the world.

In the 1970s, Union made a commitment to increase the enrollment of its minority and female students. Today, almost half of the students attending are minority and/or female. The African-American Caucus and the Gay and Lesbian Caucus are the largest student organizations at the seminary. Students studying theology at Union Seminary have the rich diversity of New York City from which to draw varied experiences. Students may take courses at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Columbia University, New York University, General Theological Seminary, and New York Theological Seminary.

Friction and conflict that is apparent in the City often invades the seminary community as well. Inside the hallowed quadrangle of Union's cloistered

⁷1993-1995 *Union Theological Seminary Catalog*.

community, students must grapple with the issues of everyday life. A case in point: During the fall semester of 1993, a Ph.D. student giving a class presentation stated that "the Bible teaches that blacks are inherently inferior to whites. In fact, all minorities are inferior to persons of European descent." The storm that arose from this student's remarks was enormous. The student was brought before the student senate, the academic disciplinary committee and the academic dean. The student held firm to his beliefs, refused to recant his statement, and was subsequently removed from seminary housing. He continued, however, to matriculate at Union.

Incidents such as this one are as much a part of the Union environment as are the academic activities. Students come to this 158-year old institution from different places and with different agendas, to discover what God is doing in the/their world. In the process of discovery, we find that Union is a microcosm of the world-at-large, and as we discover God we discover much about ourselves in the process.

For the most part, students who matriculate at Union Seminary are coming to this institution as second-career students. Many come to Union not seeking a career in full-time ministry, but just wanting the background of a seminary education. There is a full range of diversity on the faith spectrum at Union. Many students are committed Christians with a firm faith in God. Others are searching for new avenues and ways of experiencing God. Still others are not quite sure what they believe about God. There is a large contingent of Universalist Unitarian (UU) students at Union Seminary. This is due in part to the fact that the newly appointed

president of the seminary, Holland "Holly" Hendrix is a UU. He replaced Donald L. Shriver, who served as president of the seminary community for twenty-six years.

The Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, Georgia is the largest predominantly African-American seminary in the world. Founded in 1958, ITC is unique in that it is a consortium of six different denominations sharing faculty and administrative resources. This grand experiment in denominational ecumenism takes place in the midst of the Atlanta University Center (AUC), yet another consortium of African-American institutions of higher learning that includes Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse, Spelman and Morris Brown Colleges and the Morehouse School of Medicine. Together, the graduates of the AUC give to the world over 50% of African-American leadership.

Like the students at Union, ITC students are older and coming to the ministry after gaining employment experience in other careers. However, unlike Union students, most of the ITC students are committed to a ministry in the Christian church. While most of the students have an eye towards the pastoral ministry, many are interested in pastoral counseling, missions and sacred church music. Many see preaching as the chief activity of the Christian church and are anxious to learn to preach well.

At Union, the course was offered in the Practical Field to second- and third-year seminarians, doctoral students and auditors as a seminar course for thirteen weeks. At ITC the course was offered in Area IV to students in their second- or

third-year of the Master of Divinity program, who had completed the sermon preparation and delivery course. In both contexts the class met once a week for two hours and forty minutes. The format of the class consisted of assigned readings, lectures led by the professor and students, and discussions. The major project of the course was the development of a presentation by each student in the class, which focused upon their chosen social issue. The presentation was to be a twenty-page paper out of which a sermon was to be developed and delivered.

The enthusiasm and interest in this course showed a desire on the part of students to preach relevant and practical sermons about real issues to real people. Most of the students expressed a real interest in removing the sermon from the abstract to the practical. Many of the students were struggling with real issues in their own lives and ministries and wanted to be able to design, develop and deliver sermons that addressed those needs. In the course evaluations that were offered during each of the final class sessions, students expressed appreciation for a new and fresh approach to sermon development, as a port of entry for hearing the gospel through the prism of relevant social issues and the challenge of fresh exegetical, theological, sociological and biblical analysis.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14 NKJV

For the message of the cross is Foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18 NKJV

If I am right in believing, as I do, that the only effective hermeneutic of the gospel is the life of the congregation which believes its, one has to ask about how such congregations may be helped to become what they are called to be.¹

The Event of Jesus Christ

The Christian community is called to witness to the fact that in the life, ministry, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God, the Creator of the universe, acted decisively in the work of redeeming and restoring fallen creation. The Event of Jesus Christ took place in a specific time and exact location. But the event itself is both peculiar and special in that the action of God in the work of Atonement and Redemption is a revelation of God's love in action. The Event of Jesus Christ is just that, God's love in action. All human activity, then, is the result of our acceptance or rejection of that love.

¹Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 234.

It is this Event that is proclaimed when we preach the euangelion, the "Good News". The "Good News" is basic to the life of the Christian community. It is what the preacher/pastor stands to declare whenever she/he ascends the stairs of the pulpit. To descend from that sacred space without pronouncing aloud that "God so loved the world..." is to give a "nice talk," but it is not preaching. Preaching reveals all that God has done in Jesus Christ and challenges those who listen to embrace that reality in light of "...the mercies of God."

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The Event of Jesus Christ is an act of reconciliation on the part of God with a fallen creation (that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation--II Cor. 5:19 NKJV). It is in this word of reconciliation that our Christian witness and preaching finds its deepest significance. It reveals what God was up to in the Event of Jesus Christ. It is an act of redemption that takes place in the light of what God has done on behalf of God's creation. IT IS GOD WHO ACTS. (For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.... But God demonstrates God's own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of God's Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life--Romans 5:6, 8, 10 NJKV.)

This act of reconciliation is a grand demonstration of the love of God for all of humanity. It is important to note that through this act of love God reveals the complete inclusion of God's act of redemption. By this act of reconciliation God shows total care and concern for humanity. But more than that, God shows God's desire for relationship with that which God created. No one is left out of this decisive act of God. By this act of reconciliation God shows total concern for humanity. In order to restore the created order, God took on the sins of humankind. In Jesus Christ, God took the penalty and the punishment of sin upon himself, and thereby cancelled the debt owed by fallen humanity. Because of this action on the part of God,... "now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Ephesians 2:13 NJKV.

Further, this act of reconciliation enables humanity to be reconciled to each other. Total reconciliation is possible between individuals and institutions. What God has done in Christ serves as the perfect paradigm for reconciliation between structures in society. There no longer exists the impossibility of community between persons. By this divine act of love the means has been provided by which individuals can come into meaningful relationships.

The ministry of reconciliation is an essential part of the biblical witness of proclamation. The preacher/pastor is challenged to proclaim this as a part of the message of the gospel.

Repentance, Commitment and Service

The message of the Event of Jesus Christ and the ministry of reconciliation must lead those who hear this message to act. There is absolutely no neutrality when it comes to God's action in the world. The claim of the Event of Jesus Christ upon the life of the Christian and the community of faith is a call to action. William K. McElvaney, in *Preaching from Camelot to Covenant*, points to the call to action as a way of announcing God's action in the world:

The gospel calls the church to be a sign and an agent of the gospel in breaking through the barriers and bondage of race, sex, class, and age, both in its own life and witness and in the world at large. The gospel calls the church to be an advocate for "marginalized" people and to take side on behalf of justice in the name of God through Jesus Christ.²

Those of us who have heard the message of the Event of Jesus Christ must respond. Biblical preaching at its zenith ought to inspire the hearer to do three things: (1) repent, (2) commit, and (3) serve. It is impossible to do two and three without having done one, and it is not sufficient to do one without doing two and three.

Norman Pittenger, in his book entitled *Preaching the Gospel*, asserts that the occurrence of repentance, commitment and service is what distinguishes the preaching moment from talks on theology, politics and current affairs: "A responsi-

²William K. McElvaney, *Preaching from Camelot to Covenant: Announcing God's Action in the World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 125.

³Norman Pittenger, *Preaching the Gospel* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1984), 98.

ble preacher will want the sermon to bring about some significant result which will be appropriate to the message and meaningful to those who listen."³

For Pittenger, repentance is more than an emotional response. Rather, it is a deep sense of sorrow for human failure to live up to the possibilities that are available to us and the larger failure to nurture positive relationships with God and with other human beings. Biblical preaching ought to lead the listeners to true repentance by the recognition of these shortcomings, and create a strong desire to convert from the old ways to the new. This is what Pittenger has to say:

To fail to be one's true human self is to fail in maintaining on one's part the right relationship with God in the divine intention for humankind and at the same moment a failure in right relationships with other men and women and children, characterized as it should be by the caring, sharing, giving, and receiving which brings about a condition of peace and concord which is shalom or abundance of life.⁴

True repentance creates a strong desire to alter all of this. Once the hearers of the message are made aware of their failure to live up to the Godly example, a "conversion experience" must take place:

Such repentance, with the wish for forgiveness that looks toward the future and is not merely regret about the past, is awakened when the gospel is authentically proclaimed.... When one knows through the action of God in the Event of Jesus Christ that one is already accepted and forgiven by God, the great lover of the world, one's only response can be, 'I am unworthy' ... then I am impelled to see my own inadequacy, defects, failures and wrongs. And I am also impelled to turn, or to wish to turn, to the right ways.⁵

⁴Ibid., 98-99.

⁵Ibid., 99.

Authentic biblical preaching that leads to conversion likewise will bring about a sense of commitment to social action and change. This commitment can be for the first time or "a renewed response in self-dedication to God who in Christ has acted decisively for us humans and for our wholeness."⁶ Again, such a commitment is not born out of a "knee-jerk" emotional response, but rather it comes about as a direct result of genuine conversion. "With some there may be an almost overwhelming sense of being caught up in the new life; with others, probably with the majority, it will be much more a matter of decision and purpose that is not highly-fevered, but is rather a strong determination to give oneself fully and unreservedly to the Lord and to that Lord's work and way in the world."⁷

Of the three, the greatest challenge to biblical preaching will be to compel the listeners to commit their time, talent and treasures to works of service in the world. Authentic biblical preaching that addresses real life situations must do this. Those persons who have embraced the truth of the message of God's loving action on behalf of humanity must be led into concrete avenues of Christian service. Genuine service that seeks to eradicate and eliminate some of the world's ills and injustice is a visible demonstration to the world that God has acted in the life of the disciple. God has acted. They have responded. This response is not a matter of self-

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

aggrandizement, which can only lead to boasting, but rather is the most appropriate response to what God has done in the life of the believer and in the world. ("I beseech you therefore brethren {friends}, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" Romans 12:1 NKJV.)

Biblical preaching will always include a direct challenge to get out into the world and serve: "It includes a challenge to the listeners to give themselves, to the best of their ability, to the discipleship which is service of God among humanity--to 'do works of love', with as much self devotion as can be managed."⁸ Authentic biblical preaching that seeks to lead the listeners to personal maturity and responsive action must never fail to address these three elements. Occasionally there will be a failure to point to all three, but a failure to include them in the witness of the "good news" will create immature disciples, spiritually-crippled congregations, and a weak and powerless society.

The End of Preaching

Authentic biblical preaching will prepare the listener for the "The day" when that which has been proclaimed will be revealed. The future of the Christian is in the "already and the not yet." Authentic biblical preaching points "time toward eternity." History is moving toward a future end time of judgment and salvation.

⁸Ibid., 100.

Neither can be escaped. Preaching on social issues creates an expectancy of hope in the future. The spiritually-mature congregation and disciples have arrived at the point where they can truly worship God and act in the world. The worship of God involves the belief in the realization and the birth of our hope: an eternal reign with God.

CHAPTER III

LINKING TEXTS WITH CONTEXTS: THE MODEL DEVELOPED

Course Overview and Syllabus

This course overview and syllabus served as the working outline for the class CAM850/02, "Preaching As Social Commentary," taught during the fall semester 1995 at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.

CAM 850/02 - "Preaching As Social Commentary"

3 hours credit

Fall Semester 1995

Saturdays - 8:00 a.m. - 10:40 a.m.

Room B-116

Professor Carolyn Ann Knight

Phone: 404/527-7748 or 758-9664

Course Purpose: To help students develop an interest in and awareness of preparing and delivering sermons that address a specific contemporary social issue; to help students develop sermons that critique and examine issues, activities and events in the marketplace, and to help the students design and construct sermons that deal with social issues.

Through biblical exegesis, theological reflection and other sources and/or resources, students will prepare sermons and case studies that provide commentary and critique on twentieth-century challenges.

Required Textbooks:

Allen, Ronald J. *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching*. Judson Press.

Buttrick, David. *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*. Westminster/John Knox Press.

Forde, Gerhard O. *Theology for Proclamation*. Fortress Press.

Loscalzo, Craig A. *Preaching Sermons That Connect*. InterVarsity Press.

Proctor, Samuel D. *How Shall They Hear?* Judson Press.

Proctor, Samuel D. *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet*. Judson Press.

Van Seters, Arthur, ed. *Preaching As a Social Act: Theology and Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. (Out of print; on two-hour reserve in the Woodruff Library)

Class Schedule:

September 2, 1995 -- No class. LABOR DAY HOLIDAY.

September 9, 1995 -- Class Introductions/Course Overview. Lecture and Discussion: "Linking Texts with Contexts: The Importance of Preaching on Social Issues."

September 16, 1995 -- Lecture and Discussion: "What Does God Want to Communicate?: A Theological Rationale."

September 23, 1995 -- Lecture and Discussion: "Preaching a Stand: The Preacher As Social Commentator."

September 30, 1995 -- Lecture and Discussion: "Designing/Building the Social Issues Sermon." Selection of Social Issue and Sermonic Scripture Pericope.

October 7, 1995 -- Sermon Paradigm: The African-American Sermon Model.

October 14, 1995 -- Case Study I: Martin Luther King, Jr.

October 21, 1995 -- Case Study II: Charles G. Adams, Pastor, Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan.

October 28, 1995 -- Outline for Class Project DUE!!! Students are to present a detailed description of the project and sermon outline.

November 4, 1995 -- Outline for Class Project DUE!!! Students are to present a detailed description of the project and sermon outline.

November 11, 1995 -- Class Project Presentation/Sermon and Discussion.

November 18, 1995 -- Class Project Presentation/Sermon and Discussion.

November 25, 1995 -- Class Project Presentation/Sermon and Discussion.

December 2, 1995 -- Class Project Presentation/Sermon and Discussion.

December 9, 1995 -- Class Project Presentation/Sermon and Discussion.

Class Assignments:

1. Develop a class project on the Social Issue of interest to you that reflects the stated objectives of this course. The project will be presented before the class. Students will be given one-half of the class period to make their presentation and facilitate class discussion. Students will preach one sermon that grows out of the class project in the context of worship. The class project and the sermon are written assignments to be handed in to the professor in final form at the end of the semester. Length of class project: minimum - 12 pages; maximum - 20 pages.

2. Two critical reviews. One critical review must be on *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* by David Buttrick; the second one on a book of the student's choosing.

Class Requirements:

Students are expected to attend all class sessions; to participate in class discussions; and to hand in all class assignments when they are due. All work for this course is due on **DECEMBER 15, 1995. ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS!!!**

Grading:

Grading for this course will be a composite of all course work, class participation, class project, sermon and class attendance. The class project is 60% of the grade.

Lectures

I. Linking Texts with Contexts: Preaching on Social Issues.

Reading Assignment:

Van Seters, Arthur, ed. *Preaching as a Social Act*.

Buttrick, David. *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*.

II. What Does God Want to Communicate?: A Theological Rationale.

Reading Assignment:

Kraft, Charles H. *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*.

III. Preaching a Stand: The Role of Prophetic Critique.

Reading Assignment:

Smith, Christine M. *Preaching As Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*.

IV. Building the Word: Designing the Social Issues Sermon.

Reading Assignment:

Sider, Ronald J. and Michael A. King. *Preaching About Life in a Threatening World*.

- V. Shoes That Fit Our Feet: The African-American Sermon Model
Sermon Sample: "If Thou Be a Great People!"
- VI. Case Study I: Martin Luther King, Jr.
- VII. Case Study II: Charles Gilchrist Adams

Class Format

This course was taught as an upper-level graduate seminar. It was expected that students would come to class having read the assigned readings, and be prepared to discuss the readings. The lectures were given to facilitate discussion.

Lecture I

"Linking Texts with Contexts: Preaching on Social Issues"

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10-11, NKJV

What do the ancient texts of the Bible have to say to a world poised on the brink of the twenty-first century? Is it possible to link the world of the Bible to our contemporary world? If so, how and who is responsible for making the connection? All of these questions are essential to a discussion about preaching on social issues. The answers to these questions, although simple, do not readily supply the methodology for preaching on social issues: The ancient texts of the Bible have

much to say to our contemporary context. It is possible to make the connection and the preacher is responsible for making that connection.

Preaching on social issues, bringing the world of the Bible into the world of contemporary Christians is the most critical task of preaching today. People who are returning to church these days are doing so because they are in urgent need of a word beyond this world that speaks cogently, relevantly and powerfully to their situation in this world. This is the task of preaching on social issues to convince the Christian in this time that the world of the Bible has a fresh word for them. The hearers of sermons these days want sermons that provide a way of salvation, wholeness, and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but beyond that they want sermons that hold some significance for the world in which they live.

Preaching is essentially a redemptive activity. In the very act of preaching, God encounters, probes, and challenges the human spirit. Preaching is one of God's methods of saving the world. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21 NKJV). But preaching is also a transformative activity. God uses preaching as an avenue through which lives, and thereby the world, can be changed for the better.

To understand preaching as an avenue whereby the world is transformed is to understand preaching on social issues as an evangelistic activity. There can be no true evangelism without preaching on social issues. Addressing the needs of those who listen to sermons through the sermon is the preacher's way of announcing God's action in this world. When the preacher addresses social issues in the sermon event, that preacher brings the good news of God's solutions to critical social concerns. "Our good news must be God's good news. Preaching on social issues must have as its bottom line God's solutions to the national and global concerns of our day."¹ Preaching on social issues says to persons listening to the sermons that God is actively involved in the affairs of humankind. The sermon that addresses social issues uses the ancient texts of the Bible to say that God has acted in Israel and in Jesus, and God continues to act in the church today, transforming us and the world.

The World of the Bible

Preaching on social issues requires that one understand the world of the Bible. To understand the world of the text and to interpret that text in the light of a contemporary context is an act of faith that requires honest, identifiable engagement of the text. For Walter Brueggeman this is a "willful act of production

¹Ronald J. Sider and Michael A. King, *Preaching About Life in a Threatening World* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 14.

of meaning,"² in which the community is at work with the text. The act of generating a text that can be heard by a contemporary listening community is an act of decisive faith. It is an act of construal and discerning on the part of the community of faith. The responsibility for bringing the community of faith to such a moment of decision is that of the preacher.

Interpretation is all the action between formation and reception that seeks to assert the authority and significance of the text. This interpretive step includes the classical creeds and commentaries, the long history of theological reflection, contemporary scholarship, and contemporary church pronouncements. Above all, it includes the interpretative work of the preacher in the sermon.³

Further,

It is in the sermon that the church has done its decisive, faith-determining interpretation. The sermon is not an act of reporting on a text, but it is an act of making a new text visible and available. This new text in part is the old text, and in part is the imaginative construction of the preacher which did not exist until the moment of utterance by the preacher.⁴

It is the task of the homiletician and the preacher to interpret the function of the biblical in the life of the community.

Often in homiletics there is a primary emphasis on the world of the text. Homileticians and preachers alike are concerned with such things as how sacred texts function in the life of the community, how texts are interpreted,

²Walter Brueggeman, "The Social Nature of the Biblical Text for Preaching," in *Preaching As a Social Act*, ed. Arthur Van Seters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 127.

³Ibid., 128.

⁴Ibid.

how texts have evolved in meaning and interpretation in the life of the church, and how the literary and distinctive qualities of texts function in the liturgical and religious life of the people.⁵

How this function of interpretation is determined is an act of faith and imagination.

It is an act of faith because it relies on the work of God's Spirit of truth. It is an act of the imagination that the interpreter and the listener have a part in determining the meaning of the text.

The textual process is at every point an act of faith. In faithful interpretation, the entire process is governed by the work of God's Spirit of truth. It is this that permits interpretation to be an act of faith. The promise of faith is the conviction that in its formation, interpretation, and reception the text is a word of life that makes a difference. No part of this process is undertaken on the pretense that this is objective or neutral or a matter of indifference.⁶

But this act of faith must be accompanied by imagination. "The transforming power of the church declines whenever it loses its religious imagination by which I mean its ability to envision and communicate images of an alternative reality that can break the sign of normative consciousness."⁷

Preaching on social issues requires an interpretation of the biblical text that will enable the community of faith to discern God's work in the act of personal and

⁵Christine M. Smith, *Preaching As Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 1.

⁶Brueggeman, "The Social Nature of the Biblical Text," 129.

⁷Thomas H. Troeger, "The Power of Myth As a Key to Preaching on Social Issues," in *Preaching As a Social Act: Theology and Practice*, ed. Arthur Van Seters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 211.

social transformation. This act of God can only be understood by the community through faith. Therefore, when preaching on social issues, the preacher "...should help persons see reality in a new light and the event of preaching should lead to personal transformation. The personality of those who preach must be loving and winning, especially if preachers are to address social issues."⁸ Further,

Anyone then, who is going to preach on social issues needs to understand the power of myth and its poetic language of image and symbol, their grip upon the language of the heart, and the enormous energies that they may release for good or evil.... Information and well-reasoned analysis belong in sermons, but they are ineffectual as long as the preacher has not entered the landscape of the heart and challenged the reigning metaphors of secularist national culture with images and narratives of faith.⁹

Questions for Discussion

1. What is your understanding of the role of the preacher in bringing together ancient biblical texts and contemporary situations?
2. How does the Bible function as an instrument of interpretation for the community of faith in discerning God's action in the world?
3. What is the role of faith and imagination in determining the function of ancient biblical texts in the liturgical and religious life of the community of faith?

Lecture II

"What Does God Want to Communicate?: A Theological Rationale"

⁸J. Alfred Smith, "Preaching and Social Concerns," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 512.

⁹Troeger, "The Power of Myth As a Key to Preaching," 206, 208.

Any discussion about preaching on social issues must rightly begin with God. For in all preaching, it is not our message that we carry, but God's. It is not our good news, but rather it is God's good news. We are not telling only our story, but mindful that God also has a story. Nowhere is this more true than when we talk about preaching on social issues. Preaching about the needs and issues that affect the lives of the community of faith brings God directly into contact with that which God has created. God's direct involvement in the affairs of the community of faith is both a divine endorsement and divine empowerment behind the divine message that God wants to communicate to the listening community. In communicating with creation about the needs and issues that concern us, God is saying that God has chosen pulpit proclamation as a viable form for transporting the message of redemption, salvation and personal and social transformation. It is through the scriptures, the Bible, that God is disclosed as seeking to communicate with that which God created. In this way, the Bible becomes the book through which we understand God's strategy for communication.

Preaching on social issues has been called a multi-leveled existential discourse. It requires understanding what God is doing and saying, and faithfully interpreting God's action to the community of faith. In this way, preaching on social issues involves God and people, people and people, preacher and God, preacher and people. For preaching on social issues to be considered a significant divine activity, there must be total communication on all levels. How can the preacher

effectively communicate God's actions in the world without faithful, obedient and diligent interpretation of the biblical texts? How can the people hear the message without a critical investment by faith in the God of the text? How can the people respond to the message from the preacher if there is no experience of trust that he/she has faithfully understood from God both the biblical message and the concerns of the community? Good preaching on social issues, then, would be a total communicative experience that entails involvement on the part of all persons concerned.

Over and over in the Gospels, we see that Jesus was concerned about the needs of the people. In fact, a closer reading of the scripture reveals that Jesus addressed the social needs of the people first; then He addressed their spiritual condition. When Jesus Christ encountered hungry people, he fed them. When he saw persons who were blind or lame or infirm, he first cured their condition. When he encountered a demoniac or a lunatic, he spoke to the immediate need, then addressed the spiritual condition. He went to the home of Peter's mother-in-law; he went to the pool of Bethesda; and he went to the graveside of Lazarus to meet a specific need first; then Jesus addressed the spiritual condition. This is the most salient ingredient that defines preaching as a social act, in that it speaks to the needs and the issues of the people. It also points to God's supreme desire to communicate what God desires in the life of the community of faith; that is, redemption and relationship. But beyond God's desire for redemption and reconciliation, God

desires to elicit a response from the community of faith that will bring about radical personal and social transformation not only in the community, but in the world.

As the manifestation of God's visible presence on earth, it was the very nature of Jesus Christ to be specific. Jesus spoke to specific people about specific needs and situations. This point is very important for those persons interested in preaching on social issues. It is God's way to be specific.

In behaving credibly and demonstrating what he taught, Jesus was concerned for specific people, approaching them with messages relevant to their needs. He did not simply speak general messages to general audiences. It is God's way to be specific. Whether it is God's seeking after Adam, his call of Israel, the giving of the Ten Commandments, his calling of Samuel or Isaiah or the twelve disciples, or the specificity of Jesus's life in a Galilean village and his ministry in a small Mediterranean country, or Paul's addressing of his letters to specific congregations, it is characteristic of God to relate to specific people with specific messages.¹⁰

In doing this, God is demonstrating a desire to communicate with us. In this way God becomes one with us, entrusting us to hear the message and commit our lives to God, to each other and in service to the world. God walks where we walk, eats what we eat and lives like we live. In doing this, God demonstrates a personalness in communicating with us. God takes our human situation seriously and gives us a message that is specific in meeting and addressing those needs. It is a credible message in that is designed and addressed to specific persons in a specific context.

¹⁰Charles H. Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 20.

The nature of the Bible also portrays this characteristic of God. The Bible is a collection of case histories, recording specific personal encounters within specific socio-cultural contexts. Were it merely a human product it might well have become a textbook-type presentation of general principles. As it is, though, the Bible provides a clear indication of God's commitment to specificity in communication.¹¹

This strategy, used by God through Jesus Christ, is extremely critical for those of us who would preach on social issues. Preaching on social issues requires that we be specific in our communicational interactions. Preaching on specific issues, in a specific context and in a specific way, communicates clearly and powerfully God's message of reconciliation and transformation to the community of faith and allows that community to make the most appropriate response and act accordingly. When preaching on social issues, it is extremely important to learn the lesson of specificity. Specificity in communication allows the preacher to encourage the listener to discover who God is and what God has done in real-life experiences.

God wants to communicate God's desire for redemption and reconciliation with us. Having redeemed us and been reconciled with us, God further demonstrates that God has entrusted to us the community of faith which will respond to the message that we have heard with the right action in the world. God demonstrates that we are trusted enough, not only to understand the message that God communicates, but also that we will take responsibility for the cause of God

¹¹Ibid.

here on earth. In this way, God is saying that the message that God wants to communicate is our message as well.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the message that God wants to communicate to the community of faith?
2. What is the significance of this message for preaching on social issues?
3. What is the significance of the Incarnation, for preaching on social issues?
4. Describe what is meant by "specificity" in preaching on social issues?
5. How is the ministry and the preaching of Jesus Christ an important example for preaching on social issues?

Lecture III

"Preaching a Stand: The Role of Prophetic Critique"

To preach on social issues is to assume the role of a preacher/prophet. A critical function of needs and issues-oriented preaching is an accurate assessment of the social, political and economic climate of society. But moving beyond an accurate assessment of the climate, the preacher/prophet must stand ready to critique and, if need be, criticize the powers that be.

The preacher has the unique responsibility to stand tall in the midst of our moral confusion, our spiritual estrangement, and our lost opportunities and to declare that God is with us in our situation. News commentators, columnists, analysts, and television anchor people may make plain what our condition is, with meticulous detail and fastidious accuracy, but no one except

the preacher is expected to proclaim that above, around, beneath and throughout this deep, dark morass lies the pervasive purpose of a loving and caring God.¹²

To be a preacher/prophet, assessing and critiquing the social climate involves a tremendous amount of risk of the person who assumes this role. To preach is to risk; to preach on social issues is to risk even more.

A brief survey of the biblical landscape, particularly the Hebrew Bible, yields the perils of the preacher/prophet in mass society. The political incarcerations of Jeremiah, Jonah and Daniel are vivid case studies of those who questioned and challenged authority in order to announce God's action in the world in their day. And even though the dungeons and lion dens may not be the fate of those of us who preach on social issues in this day and age, the risks are enormous. That is why the preacher/prophet must, first of all, be certain of his/her own theology before attempting to preach on social issues.

The preachers who would dare to address social issues from the pulpit must have a clear understanding of what God has done in this world and in their own circumstance. The integrity of the message of preaching on social issues is linked to the integrity of the messenger. The community of faith will believe the message, because they believe the messenger. The more the listener/audience is convinced

¹²Samuel D. Proctor, *Preaching About Crises in the Community* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988), 11.

that the preacher/prophet has been impacted by this message, the more they will believe the message. Therefore, the preacher must have worked out and worked through exactly where he/she stands on the issues before proceeding to bring them to the people.

Preaching the good news in response to community concerns is more than joining the band wagon for one popular issue after another. Rather, it is seriously responding to a situation where prophetic insight must be applied in very delicate and uncomfortable situations.¹³

Preaching on social issues involves the preacher/prophet, first of all, in serious theological reflection. The preacher must come to understand his/her reality in the light of God's action in the world. The preacher cannot preach on social issues without a firm understanding of what God has done in the past, is doing in the present, and will do in the future. The preacher of social issues must be thoroughly convinced that God is actively involved in the affairs of humankind and is concerned about a harmonious resolution to these affairs.

In this regard, the preacher/prophet is taking risk, to be sure. But it is not the credibility or the integrity of the preacher that is at stake, it is God's. It is God's message. It is God's action. It is God who has spoken into existence the possibility of a better world and a better future. Therefore, it is God's word and credibility that

¹³Ibid., 18.

is on the line. But it is through the preacher/prophet that the integrity and credibility of God is manifested. When the preacher has resolved his/her own theology in light of reality as he/she has experienced it, the message of God has wider acceptance and believability.

The preacher as theologian must have worked through his/her own understanding of God and how God acts in the world. This understanding of the preacher's own theology is done against the backdrop of the biblical witness that has been formulated across the centuries.

The biblical witness that we are called to interpret has been formulated across the centuries by the church on faith and has a specific and traditional content. That is, we have come to believe and to hold certain formulas to be true and unchanging down through the centuries. At different times in the life of the church, these traditions that we hold true have manifested themselves as creeds, dogma and doctrines of the church and have become the theology of the church. The core content of the preaching of the New Testament church centered around the following notions, that the age of fulfillment, or the coming of the kingdom of God, is at hand; that this coming has taken place through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus Christ is exalted at the right hand of God as the messianic head of the new Israel; that the Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory; that the messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the second coming of Christ; that forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and salvation come with repentance.¹⁴

The preacher/prophet then, as theologian, stands within a theological tradition which cannot be ignored, if that preacher claims to be Christian.

¹⁴C. H. Dodd, "The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development: Three Lectures with an Appendix on Eschatology and History (New York: Harper & Row, 1936; reprint, 1964); quoted in Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching As Theology and Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 10.

In order to effectively preach on or about social issues, the Christian preacher must have thought through and prayed through his/her own personal theology. Before tackling the major issues of the days, the preacher must first have worked out for himself or herself what he/she believes about God. Theology is the combining of *theos* and *logos*, God and word. Simply translated, theology is how we talk about God's action in the world. In order to preach on social issues, it is not necessary for the preacher to have experiential evidence about the social issue. However, it is important to know what one believes about God and the social issue. We begin to do theology at a very early age in life, and re-write and reformulate that theology as we grow and mature in the faith and in personal experience.

There are many formative factors that influence how we arrive at our personal theology, i. e., family background, geographic location, where we were born, economic circumstances, educational background, denominations, influential personalities that we have encountered, etc. All of these influences shape our personal theology. Preaching on social issues requires that one has asked and worked through the tough theological questions, and wrestled with what God is doing in the world in light of events and activities that may contradict all that we hold true about God. To preach a stand means to ask of the biblical text and thereby, God, why there is poverty, hunger, racial hatred, violence, sexual harassment, child abuse and drug and alcohol addictions. Asking these questions means that the preacher has a certain hermeneutical suspicion with which he or she

approaches the text. This hermeneutical suspicion says at the outset, if God is ... then why? Preaching on social issues requires that we ask the question: Does God's immediate work in the world and the consummation of God's purpose form the hope that is held out to this congregation in light of their present reality?

Preaching on social issues "is not taking refuge in empty moralisms, admonishing listeners/congregations to get out there and do good and just try to have more faith."¹⁵ Neither is preaching on social issues "...becoming prophets of gloom and doom, describing in vivid details what is wrong with American society; then leaving congregations/listeners wallowing in guilt or despair, or ending the sermons with vague and generalized assurances that nevertheless hearers have been saved and have had new meaning given to their lives, and the rest they will understand better by and by."¹⁶ Preaching on social issues "acknowledges the limits of pie-in-the-sky theology without rejecting its strength,"¹⁷ but more importantly means having grounded theology that is able to answer the tough questions in light of what God has done and promised.

¹⁵Ibid., 15.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Sider and King, *Preaching About Life in a Threatening World*, 14.

Class Assignment

1. Write out a brief description of your own personal theology. Be prepared to discuss your description in class.

Lecture IV

"Building the Word: Designing the Social Issues Sermon"

*From the cowardice that shrinks from new truths, from the laziness that is content with half truths, and from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O God of Truth deliver us.*¹⁸

Every sermon, regardless of subject matter involved, requires thorough exegesis, adequate preparation and much prayer. Simply put, sermon preparation is hard work. Nowhere is this more true than when preaching on social issues.

Special preparation is necessary in order to preach on social issues. Responsible preachers must practice continuing education. These preachers must study correct biblical interpretation, theology, sociology and church history. They must seek an understanding of both sides of issues like AIDS, abortion, human sexuality, euthanasia, bio-ethics, economics, nuclear waste, ecology, affirmative action, race and racism, science and scientism, third world and minority group concerns, apartheid, divestment of church bodies in financial institutions for religious/social/political reasons, the failure of the criminal justice system, non-violence, war and the religious baptizing of partisan politics.¹⁹

In the area of homiletics there is a tendency to speak about writing the sermon, preparing the sermon, or developing the sermon. When preaching on social issues

¹⁸A prayer offered by Henlee H. Barnette, professor emeritus of Christian Ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky; quoted in J. Alfred Smith, "Preaching and Social Concerns," 511.

¹⁹Smith, "Preaching and Social Concerns," 509.

none of this terminology applies. The sermon on social issues is a process that the preacher builds over a period of time. The building of the social issues sermon begins, first and foremost, with the decision and commitment of the preacher to preach such sermons, and to be faithful to the task of seeing such a message through to completion. After the decision to preach on social issues is made, the preacher then must determine what issues are important to him/her and to the community of faith. Next, the process of building begins, but only after the drawing of a blueprint and a gathering of materials.

Choosing a Social Issue

How the preacher determines what social issues he/she will address is perhaps the most important step in the process of building the sermon. Several factors must be taken into consideration at this initial step in the procedure. Certainly there is the matter of the preacher's own personal preference and choice. This choice is key, because when a preacher selects a social issue that is of great interest and concern to him or her, the preacher brings a considerable amount of passion and integrity to the process. If the preacher feels that this issue is one of significance for the community of faith, the building process will be accompanied by diligent effort and research. More importantly, if the preacher is personally invested in the issue, then he or she will sense an urgency about hearing from God on the matter. If the preacher is impressed that this is a word for the people of God, he or she will be deeply concerned to make sure that they hear from God on the

matter, through scripture, meditation and prayer rather than just giving one's personal opinion and that of the newspapers on the social issue. The preacher will keep before him or her always that this is God's word to God's people with God's resolution.

Secondly, the preacher must ask of himself or herself some fundamental questions about the selection of a particular social issue. The most important question being: Why is this issue of interest or importance to me? Other questions are: What factors-- personal, professional or political--may be fueling my interest in this social issue? Would I be interested in hearing a sermon on this subject if I were in the congregation? Have I faced squarely and honestly any prejudices and presuppositions that I may have regarding this issue? Can I preach on this issue honestly and objectively, allowing God to speak without imposing my opinion on the issue?

It is also possible that the people will want to hear a sermon on a particular issue or need. This is a very interesting part of building the sermon. Most preachers neglect the importance of the people in the process of sermon building. For some strange reason, we feel as if we must lock ourselves away in some remote study with Bibles, commentaries and dictionaries in order to truly hear from God. I am not discounting this very important part of sermon preparation. However, when preaching on social issues, the community of faith, the ones to whom the sermon is directed, can play a very important role in the process. For instance, suppose the

preacher chooses to preach a sermon addressing HIV/AIDS; would not conversations with members of the congregation/audience be helpful in getting a sense as to where the people already are in terms of their knowledge and opinion about HIV/AIDS? It would be helpful to find out if any of the members of the congregation know someone or have known someone living with HIV/AIDS. It would be helpful to know what they already believe about HIV/AIDS from a biblical and theological standpoint. It would also be helpful to know how they feel about persons living with HIV/AIDS being a part of the community of faith, and what they would be willing to do to include those persons in their community. It would be helpful to know what are their prejudices and presuppositions about HIV/AIDS. Certainly there are matters of confidentiality in building a sermon in this way, but that is true of every sermon. Inviting members of the community of faith to be a part of building the social issues sermon can be an exciting and rewarding process.

Often there will be a need in the larger community that must be addressed from the pulpit. When this is the case, the preacher must not shrink from the task of confronting head-on the concerns of the society with God's resolutions. The preacher must always be faithful in the matter of saying, "this is the word of the Lord" regarding this issue. However, the preacher must be responsible when preaching in this way. This is not the time for "grandstanding" and "showboating" just because there is an issue that is popular in the culture. It is not a time to preach

simple solutions and fancy titles and cute phrases. However, it is a time to bring the light of God's word into the darkness of public opinion, prejudices and ignorance. Moments such as these can be real opportunities for the preacher to lift up the cause of Jesus Christ in the midst of our human causes.

The Bible

The Bible is the primary tool of the Christian church and of preaching. The Bible is a collection of books that we turn to again and again to discern God's action in the world, and our response to all that God has done in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the Bible is also a book of particularity in that it was written in a particular time and place, for a particular people, living in a particular culture. This has been and is the critical task and challenge of the contemporary Christian church –to understand and interpret those ancient texts in light of their present reality. Nowhere is this challenge greater than when preaching on social issues. How the preacher links ancient biblical texts with contemporary contexts is the most important aspect of preaching on social issues.

An accurate understanding and interpretation of the text reveals God's will for the community of faith. An inaccurate understanding and interpretation raises more questions than it answers and confuses rather than enlightens. For this reason, the selection of the text in preaching on social issues is critical. The problem with most preaching on social issues is that the preacher already knows what he or she wants to talk about before finding an appropriate biblical text. Many times the

preacher will already have the sermon roughly outlined in his or her head; then begins the searching of the Bible for a text that will fit the subject of the sermon. While this is dangerous, I am not sure that it can be avoided when preaching on social issues.

For this reason, the preacher must rely on careful exegesis of whatever passage is selected. If, after reading the passage in the original languages, doing an exegetical outline and arriving at an exegetical idea, the scripture passage selected is not suited for the social issue, either the scripture or the social issue must be abandoned and the entire process must begin again. It is absolutely impossible to arrive at the homiletical destination using the wrong passage of scripture. It is important to remember that what the writer of the passage of scripture was thinking and addressing in his time will be different than what you want to address, since his congregation will be different from yours. Surely, the world of the Bible had its challenges, but the writers of those ancient biblical texts were not addressing the issues that we face in this contemporary context. The preacher must be careful to avoid simple comparisons and associations between the ancient world of the Bible and ours. There certainly may be similarities, but to suggest such things as leprosy was the HIV/AIDS of that day, that the man who Peter and John encountered outside of the temple represents the homeless of every generation, and that the Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the well was an abused woman is to take liberties with the texts that exegesis may or may not yield.

When preaching on social issues, the Bible must be used to show that God is involved in the affairs of humankind, that God was very active in the ancient world of the Bible, and that God is very involved in our contemporary contexts. That the God who spoke and acted in the Bible is acting and speaking to this present generation. Preaching on social issues should direct the listener/audience to a loving God revealed in scripture, who is concerned about our affairs. The Bible should be used in preaching on social issues to point to a God who is involved in our lives and our affairs in this way. Preaching on social issues should use the Bible to point the world of the ancient culture to the contemporary world.

The History of the Church--Universal and Local

Preaching does not take place in a vacuum. The preacher is not coming to biblical texts as one who is preaching this text for the very first time. The truth of the matter is that all of the texts in the Bible have been preached many times before. In this way, the preacher is not plowing fresh ground or turning new soil. Someone has been this way before. Knowing this should eliminate the preacher's sitting before biblical texts, trying to invent an original thought. There are none. This will free the preacher to hear from God about the relevance of this text for this time. The preacher who is committed to preaching on social issues will make proper use of the Bible texts, do thorough exegesis and homiletical work while making use of other resources during the building of the sermon.

Among these resources are the history of the church. The preacher would do well to avail himself or herself to the tradition of the church on matters of social issues. It would be both wise and helpful to see what the church's position has been in the past, what the church's position is presently, and compare how those positions have changed or remained the same through the years. Nowhere is this more true than in the areas of civil rights, gay rights and abortion. For years and years, the Church has had deep feelings on these issues. To be well equipped to preach on any one of these issues, the preacher would be wise to study the findings of denominational commissions and task forces, to see what is the prevailing position of the church. In addition, there are many new issues that the Church has recently been called upon to study and take a public position. Among these issues are ageism, health care, child and domestic abuse, the environment. The Church has become involved in these issues, and the preacher preparing to preach on social issues must not neglect the findings of the Church Universal. He or she may not agree with the studies or the findings, but such research should not be ignored when building the social issues. Remember, the goal of the social issues sermon is to be objective and clear. It is to bring God's solutions into human affairs.

Not only is there the opinion of the Church Universal on social issues, but the local church also has an opinion. There may not have been a formal study, nor was a consensus opinion reached; however, the preacher needs to be aware that members of the audience/congregation have formed some opinion on every social

issue imaginable. The preacher should not make a critical mistake in neglecting to discover where "the listeners are" before preaching on a particular social issue. Inviting the listeners into the building process when preaching on social issues does at least two things. First, it will discover where their interests are and what they are willing to do about a particular issue after having heard the sermon. Are they willing to bring their response to this issue in line with God's actions? Are they willing to take ownership as a congregation for addressing this issue in the larger community? Secondly, inviting the listeners into the building process will avoid unnecessary battlefields and land mines. The preacher will be able to discover early what the "mood and the attitude" of the audience/congregation is and sidestep any potential trouble spots. A word of caution here. The preacher who would preach on social issues is called to a prophetic ministry. To be prophetic is to be unpopular. Therefore, the preacher, having discovered what "the mood of the environment" is cannot abandon preaching on a particular issue just because he or she senses that it is not popular with the audience or the listener. He or she must keep in mind that this is God's word for the people, and it must be preached even though it is an uncomfortable word. The wise preacher on social issues will be able to help the people to see this.

The Culture

One cannot ignore public discourse when preaching on social issues. If the church is to be faithful in addressing the issues of the day, it must assume the high

moral ground of public truth. It is not enough to talk about a Savior nailed to a cross as the redeemer of a sinful world. The church must enable a fragmented society to see that same Savior as the restorer of wholeness in a broken age. The church and the preacher who would preach on social issues must enable society to see Jesus Christ as the source of ultimate power. Preaching on social issues should help people to see that in a pluralist society, God has spoken in a resounding way about the diverse and complex issues of our times. The church's role in assuming this "moral high ground" cannot be represented as one truth among many, but rather it should be seen as a demonstration of the "Truth" of God for this moment.

Preaching on social issues will require that the preacher be sensitive to the language of the culture. The preacher must be aware of the conversations that are taking place in the "marketplace of ideas." He or she must be attuned to the discourse of diverse peoples who are influencing the attitudes of the culture. How is the preacher then to be heard amidst the many diverse conversations that are transported over a variety of media and communication vehicles? Fortunately, the preacher can make use of these same vehicles of communication. Television, radio, newspaper, computer, internet and cyberspace (although we are not sure what "online" sermons will look like) are all available to the preacher on social issues. In order to impact the culture, the preacher on social issues must be aware of what is going on in the culture.

The Facts

Recently in a class that I teach on sermon preparation and delivery, a student was passionately preaching a sermon about the "last days." He was going on and on about the imminent return of Jesus Christ to the earth to gather the scattered community of saints. Needless to say, there was much talk about those who have not made their commitment to Jesus Christ being cast in the eternal lake of fire. He talked about a day that is coming when we will no longer be able to buy and sell unless we have received the mark of the beast. Then he produced newspaper article after newspaper article to make his case and support his theory. The problem with this sermon and this type of preaching is that it did not line up with the facts of the newspaper or the Bible.

Perhaps the most critical and crucial element when preaching on social issues is making sure you have all of the facts, and that you have reported them accurately. Since preaching on social issues involves disseminating information, it is important that when gathering statistics, the figures should be the most recent and reliable facts available. Specific numbers and information are important. When preaching on social issues, generalizations do more harm than good. The preacher must take time to go to the library and gather the most recent information, so that the facts of the issue may be stated to the listener accurately.

Preparing to Preach

After all of these elements of the sermon have been brought together, the preacher must now decide how she or he is going to address the issues at hand.

Since the purpose of preaching on social issues is to change the behavior or the action of the audience/congregation, the preacher must decide on the type of sermon presentation that will best bring about such a change. Since behavior does not change immediately, but rather over a period of time, I believe the best approach to preaching on social issues is to preach a sermon issue over a period of four weeks minimum and eight weeks maximum. Four weeks is a sufficient amount of time to enable the preacher to introduce the issue, disseminate information about the issue, and reveal what the Bible has to say about the issue. Four weeks will keep the audience/congregation interested in the issue being discussed and expectantly anticipating what their role should be. If need be, the series can be extended to eight weeks, only if the social issue itself warrants such a long series. To try to stretch it out when there is no real need will cause both the preacher and the audience/ congregation to lose interest, and instead of looking for ways to get involved in the social issue, they will only breathe a sigh of relief when the series is over.

In order to make sure that the intent of the preacher is communicated through a series of sermons, it is important to provide as many avenues for sermon feedback as possible. Whereas the preacher may not want to do this for every sermon, it is crucial for effective preaching on social issues. Again, the purpose of preaching on social issues is to elicit a response and change some behavior in the listener and in the world. Bible study, seminars, public forums, coffee clutches and

talk backs are all ways to strengthen and clarify the social issues sermon. It will also help the preacher to determine if the sermon is on target.

Class Assignment

1. Outline class project and sermon. Students are to present a detailed description of the project and sermon outline.
2. Provide an Abstract of the course project.

Lecture V

"Shoes That Fit Our Feet: The African-American Sermon Model"

For the most part, preaching in the African-American context is preaching that responds to some critical societal need. While much preaching done in the African-American context is evangelical in design, it is evangelical in that it addresses a social need as a way of bringing individuals to personal salvation. Because of its history rooted in one hundred and forty-four years of slavery, one hundred and twenty-five years of legalized segregation, countless years of second-class citizenship and degradation, and a resurgence of modern-day racism, African-American preaching is a most appropriate paradigm for preaching on social issues.

The earliest experiences and exposure of African slaves to Christianity on these shores reveal that almost immediately the slaves heard contradictions in the sermons that they were hearing, and in the God they had come to know in their heads, hearts and spirits. "The preaching tradition of the Black ancestors did not spring into existence suddenly. It was developed during a long and often quite

disconnected series of contacts between the Christian gospel, variously interpreted, and African men and women caught up in the Black experience of slavery and oppression."²⁰ Having been able to negotiate the contradictions, these Africans were to fashion their own "sermons" that addressed the issues of their day.

Using what they knew of the prophets and what they understood about the power of God and the love of Jesus, they were able to convince their "listeners" that there was a better day coming. This was just the beginning of the African-American community's understanding of preaching on social issues. Because of the perilous predicament of the African American in America, the pulpit and the sermon became the major method of communication with a marginalized people. Because the pulpit was considered "free", the preacher was often considered the most independent person in the African-American community. "The proclamation of the Black pulpit survives likewise because, in its isolation from the mainstream, it spoke and it speaks peculiarly to the needs of blacks."²¹ The preacher could say things from the pulpit that no other professional of that era could say. Therefore, the pulpit became more than just a place where the gospel and cute Bible stories could be heard. The pulpit became an agent for social change in the community.

²⁰Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 23.

²¹*Ibid.*, 20.

From the pulpits of the African-American church, rallies were planned, voters were registered, marches organized and monies were raised. From the pulpit listeners were sent out with their marching orders for conduct and decorum on the job and around "the man." From the pulpits, the African-American listeners learned what was "going down" and when. Since the pulpit was in the church and the Bible was interspersed with these instructions, the listeners were unable to make noticeable distinction between the preachers' words and God's word. For the most part they were one. The preacher used the Bible to convince the listener that this is what God would have them to do and how God would have them to behave in this world. This was so different than what they had heard just a few years ago in slavery.

A key element of African-American sermons is the identification of their story and struggle in the biblical texts. To be able to make parallels between the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and Blacks in America, to be able to compare the liberation of the Israelites with the emancipation of the slaves gives meaning and substance to the African-American sermon.

Exposed in depth to the Old Testament, the slaves found it amazingly similar to their traditional faith. There were many parallels, such as the Tower of Babel, a female source of evil, and a deception story quite similar to Jacob's story. The word *tribe* in the Old Testament means extended family society, just

as it does in West Africa. They knew God to be just, provident, omnipotent, omniscient. Their praise names for God consisted of these very theological adjectives.²²

What is important in African-American preaching is to convince the audience/listener that God is not only concerned about you in the "sweet by and by", but God is also concerned and involved in your affairs right now. This element of the African-American sermon is critical for preaching on social issues as well, because it announces God's action and demonstrates God's involvement in the world.

The African-American sermon is a model for preaching on social issues first of all, because it is deeply biblical preaching. In spite of the fact that the Bible was initially used against them, to keep them in slavery and second-class citizenship, African Americans are people of the book.

Any understanding of Black preaching must include a sensitivity to the multifaceted Black-culture approach to the Bible, because Black preaching has been centered in the Bible throughout its history. Black congregations do not ask what is a preacher's personal opinion. They want to know what God has said through the preacher's encounter with the Word.²³

The sermons that have the greatest and most lasting impact are those sermons that are biblical. The African-American sermon is a model for preaching on social issues because of the personal experience and association of the community of faith with

²²Ibid., 57.

²³Ibid., 56.

the causes and issues that affect their lives. The preacher who would preach on social issues in the African-American context has a listening audience that knows first-hand about oppression and racism, drugs and violence, crime and shrinking social services. This is not to say that other races and ethnic groups have not had and do not have these experiences, but the African American knows from experience what it is like to deal with these issues while still clinging tenaciously to the faith. Persons who know from experience what it is like to be disenfranchised, discentered, and cut off from the mainstream of life are able to preach on social issues with passion and conviction.

Again, this is not a domain only for the African-American church and preacher. Certainly every preacher will be called upon to engage in some form of social evangelism at one time or another. What an empty and unrewarding ministry any preacher will have if he or she does not dare to tackle these tough issues confronting the contemporary community of faith. What any other preacher can do by choice, the African American must do. Persons who make their way to the Black Church gather in retreat and solace; retreat from the harsh realities of being black in American and solace that at some point in the worship service, something will be said that will get them through the week, on their jobs, in the classrooms, and at home. The sermons that are preached in the African-American church must make sense, not only for life in the next world, but for life in this world.

To make sense of this world through the African-American sermon calls for a constructive engagement of the realities of this life. In this regard, the African-American preacher preaching on social issues must be willing to move beyond the "three points and a poem, the hoop and the holler" sermon methodologies. What is needed and required is thorough exegesis, research and delivery, to communicate God's involvement in this world. To communicate social issues and change behavior may not have the listening audience shouting initially, but once there is true change in their circumstance and in the world there will be plenty to celebrate.

Sermon Sample

"IF THOU BE A GREAT PEOPLE!"
(A sermon delivered by Carolyn Ann Knight)

Text: Joshua 17:13-18

So Joshua answered them, 'If thou be a great people, then go up to the hill country and clear a place for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the giants, since the mountains of Ephraim are too confined for you.'

A change in the leadership can create a crisis in any people's movement. In the succeeding years since the deaths of Mary, Marcus, Malcolm, Martin and Adam we in the African-American community have been praying for and searching for a personality that can galvanize the masses of people in much the same way that they did. Granted, there have been pretenders and contenders to the throne, but there has not been a consistent voice that can capture the attention of the African-American community. Such was not the case with the people of Israel. After the death of Moses, the transferring of the mantle of leadership was quick and smooth.

Joshua, the son of Nun was the most fitting successor to Moses because he was a man of great courage and vision. Joshua had demonstrated his visionary leadership abilities when Moses sent out the twelve spies to survey the land of Canaan, the land of opportunity and promise. While ten of the spies saw only giants, Joshua and Caleb saw grapes and milk and honey. Because Joshua was able to see the invisible and believe the impossible, he inherited the role of leader when Moses died. With the promised land now in sight, the children of Israel were ready to cease their wanderings in the wilderness. Joshua had the awesome assignment of dividing up the territory that had been conquered from smaller nations. The chief task before Joshua was that of dividing up the allotted territory according to the prescribed wishes of Joseph and his father, Jacob.

As far as we know, the process of allotment and assignment was proceeding without difficulty until Joshua got down to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Until he came to the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, everyone seemed happy with their allotment. Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph and Asenath, the wife that Joseph married while he was down in Egypt. Ephraim and Manasseh were born in Egypt. Because of his affection for his son Joseph, Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh and gave them an inheritance along with his other sons. Now if I understand my biblical geography correctly, Egypt is in the northern region of Africa, which means that Ephraim and Manasseh were an Afro-Asiatic people. In other words, they were people of color.

Upon receiving their inheritance, Ephraim and Manasseh began to grumble and complain that their share of the allotment was much too small. Their assertion was based on the fact that they were a great people; great in size and great in stature, status and standing. Because of their history and family lineage, coupled with a personal and abiding relationship with God Almighty, they insisted that their share of the land should be more. They made their complaint predicated upon the size of their tribe/family, and also on their perception of who they were as a people. They said to Joshua "we are a great people and the Lord has blessed us until now; this share of the land that you are giving to us is too small." Joshua replied, "if you are a great people then go up to the hill country and make a place for yourselves there." They countered with the fact that the Perizzites and the Canaanites and giants were in the hill country with weapons of iron and with chariots. Again Joshua says to them, "If thou be a great people, go up against the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the giants."

When I read this passage of this Scripture I cannot help but think that this is a word of challenge to the African-American individual, community and church. "If thou be a great people go up into the hill country and clear a place for yourself there!" At this critical and uncertain point of our perilous pilgrimage upon this planet we must recognize who we are as a people and appropriate our rightful inheritance .If thou be a great people, if thou be a great church, if thou be a great

community, if thou be a great family, if thou be a great man, if thou be a great woman then the challenge of the hill country awaits you.

Mind you, here we are not talking about great as a perception that is based upon race or sex or class alone, or you possess some inherent superiority over other races and ethnic groups. We are talking about greatness as harnessing the best in our people and community and making a noble contribution to this society and to this world. Here I am talking about great as a way of harnessing, husbanding the best of our spiritual, intellectual, financial, educational and political resources, and empowering our communities and enriching this society. I am not talking about exalting everything that is African, and trashing everything that is European. I am talking about the greatness that the Bible says is in all of us who claim to be the people of God. Does not the Word of God say in 1 John 4:4: "Greater is He that is in us, than he who is in the world!"

The first thing that Ephraim and Manasseh had going for them was a healthy self-identity. They said of themselves "we are a great people!" Here they practiced the art of self-definition. They refused to be defined by circumstances or environment or statistics or culture or class or race. They said of themselves, "we are a great people." We know who we are. We know our history. We have a pretty good memory and we are acquainted with the oral tradition that has come down to us. We are well aware of who are ancestors are. Our father, Joseph, was Jacob's favorite son. Jacob, our grandfather, was a schemer and a deceiver, but one night

by the ford of Jabbok he wrestled with God and prevailed, God changed his name from Jacob to Israel, and in the end he had made his peace with God. Isaac, our great-grandfather, was the only son of our great-great grandfather Abraham, who was a friend of God and received the promise by faith. Oh yeah, we know our history. We come from good stock.

Not only that, we have this covenant thing. God promised through Abraham that He would never leave us nor forsake us, that our family would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the sand on the seashore. All throughout history the blessing of God has been upon us. We are a great people.

Joshua's response to all of this was, "Wait a minute, hold on now. I know your history. Remember, we are related. We are kinsmen. I know you are indeed a great people. If thou be a great people, you go up to the hill country and make a place for yourselves." Great people are trailblazers. Great people are pioneers. Great people are visionaries. Great people have potential and power. Great people know how to chart a course, open a door, build a bridge, expect a miracle. Great people refuse to be victims of circumstance or happenstance or color, class or culture. Great people are not condemned by the conditions of their birth, or locked into Euro-centric thought patterns. You ought to have enough imagination, ingenuity, intelligence and integrity to go out and make a place for yourselves and for your children. You ought to have enough strength and indomitable fortitude to make a place for yourselves in this world. Stop lingering around the lower plains,

fretting and fuming. Set your sights on the hill country. Be creative enough to accept the challenge of the hill country.

When I think about my people, the African-American community, we are a great people. And I would submit that what we are experiencing right now--high unemployment, high crime rate, black on black crime, babies with bullets, runaways, teenage pregnancy, absent fathers, anemic mothers, disintegrating families, children with no hope, mothers who can't cope, fathers on dope, more black men in jail than in college, women forgotten too soon, men gone too soon, children dying too soon, heroes becoming zeroes, many of us kept out, kicked out, knocked out, locked out, pushed out, put out, pulled out, phrased out of this thing called life, many of us are out of the game, because we have never really been in the game, this hopelessness and despair that pervades our communities--what we are experiencing right now is really an aberration, an abnormality of who we really are.

This has to do with us wandering in this wilderness called America. We are a great people. We have a great history. Maybe not on these shores, but you have to travel farther than the slave ship, segregation and second-class citizenship to know who we are. We are a great people. We are an African-American people. But more importantly, we are an African people. The reason most of us, and especially our children, struggle with the problem of low or no self-esteem is, we are more familiar with the American side of who we are than the African side. We need to get in touch with the African side of our identity. Then we will know that we come

from a great family structure; where men are kings, where women are queens, where children affirm and appreciate every aspect of their identity. We need to get in touch with the African side to be reminded of the great ancient cities that we built. We need to get in touch with the African side so that we will be reminded of the many contributions that we have made to science, medicine, literature and the arts. We need to get in touch with the African side, and then we will know that we are a great people.

We are a great people and we have a great history. We must stop reciting the failure studies that have been done on our communities and our people. We have become such experts at cataloguing what is wrong with us, and we have internalized these studies to the point that we know them better than the people who are conducting them. But we have a history. We must not forget that God has always done great things in and through African people. Historically, we are a people formed out of adversity. In fact, out of adversity we have fashioned the authenticity of our unique perspective on humanity and divinity. They gave us straw...we gave them bricks. They gave us seeds...we gave them cotton. They gave us lemons...we made lemonade. They gave us sorrow...we wrote songs. They gave us pain...we wrote poems. They gave us trouble...we turned it into testimony. They gave us the blues...and we made it music. They gave us segregation...we gave them Spelman. They gave us misery...we gave them Morehouse. They gave us terror...we

gave them Tuskegee. They gave us burdens...we gave them Bishop. They gave us hell...we gave them Howard.

When God created beauty he came through Cleopatra; when God created warriors he came through Hannibal; when God created science he came through George Washington Carver, Daniel Day Williams and Garrett Morgan; when God wanted music he came through Beethoven, Duke Ellington, Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson and Jessye Norman; when God wanted business people he came through Madame C. J. Walker, A. G. Gaston, Earl Graves and Reginald Lewis; when God wanted to perform great athletic feats he came through Jackie Robinson, Althea Gibson, Muhammad Ali, Arthur Ashe and Michael Jordan; when God wanted to dazzle the world with dance he came through Judith Jamison, Alvin Ailey, Robert Mitchell, Hinton Battle and Gregory Hines. Our Africanness is the instrumentality that God uses to enrich and enhance his earth. God used Rosa Parks, Martin King, Adam Powell, Malcolm X and Medgar Evers to remind the world that justice will well up like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. God used Marcus Garvey to remind this world and us that we have One God, One Aim, One Destiny. God used Randall Robinson to tell a President your policy in Haiti is no good; God used Nelson Mandela to bring 350 years of apartheid to its knees. God uses Calvin Otis Butts, III to remind us that the only way to heaven is through Jesus Christ. You see, we are a great people.

Joshua said to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and to us, if thou be a great people, get up to the hill country and make a place for yourselves there. In other words, stop fighting over these petty plots of land; the hill country awaits you. Stop squabbling over these petty plots of land, stop fighting over insignificant positions and titles; stop fighting over that which is petty, trite and meaningless; stop waiting for some senior pastor to die or retire; stop waiting for some prohibition to be lifted or removed. The hill country awaits you. You have a great work to do. You have churches to build, families to save, children to nurture, men to redeem, women to empower, lives to fix, marriages to mend, colleges to revitalize, businesses to open, churches to revive, visions to realize, a nation to save, a world to evangelize, a drug epidemic to rout out, an AIDS pandemic to cure, sin to conquer, salvation to gain, songs to sing, poems to write, heaven to gain. If thou be a great people, the hill country awaits you.

Mind you, it's not easy in the hill country. The Perizzites and the Canaanites are in the hill country with their vast weapons of iron and chariots. There is opposition in the hill country; people who don't want you to be free, people who don't want you to be rich, people who don't want you to succeed, people who don't want you to be educated, people who don't want you to make it, people who are opposed to prayer in the school, people who are opposed to the cause of Jesus Christ. Who are they? They are establishment folk and the people who are bound by tradition, custom and habit, that will tell you that it cannot be done. They will tell you that your vision is too ambitious, that your dream is impossible. They say

that we have never done it this way before, and because they have iron and the chariots, the money, the means and the methods, they will stand in direct opposition to your vision.

But I just stopped by to tell you that nothing can stop an idea whose time has come, nothing can stop a people who are determined to succeed. Watch out for the opposition in the hill country. They are organized and determined. They are systematized and systemic. Sometimes it is hard to tell who they are and where they are. Sometimes they are white-collar businessmen messing with your savings and loan financial institutions. Then at other times they are the neighborhood drug dealers selling drugs to your sons and daughters. Sometimes they will make you think that they are for you. All of our opposition is not from people who look different than we do. There are people in our communities who are doing us more harm than they realize. Still other times they will make you think that they and only they deserve to be in the hill country. And sometimes they will even make you think that they are a part of your family.

The late Sandy F. Ray, that great Baptist preacher from the Cornerstone Church in Brooklyn, New York, called this the challenge of the wood country. If it were easy to go into the hill country everybody would be living there. The challenge that is before us is to conquer the hill country in our lives, our church and our community. I do not believe that there is any legislation that can help us to raise our children. I do not believe that we can pass a bill that will help us get our homes

together. I do not believe that there is a city or state ordinance that will reclaim our fathers, husbands and brothers from the call of the streets. But we are a great people.

We have the internal mechanism that can restore our families, save our babies and reclaim our men. More than that we have an Eternal Motivator that has promised to be with us. I know somebody that knows all about the hill country because he's been there. Don't get nervous. You're not going into the hill country alone. Jesus has already met the challenge of the hill country. On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame. Jesus went into the hill country and made the hill country a highway to heaven. He turned it into a gateway to eternity. He made it a roadway of reconciliation between God and humanity. Jesus went to Calvary and on Calvary, Jesus made a name for himself. And now at that name demons tremble, at that name governments are toppled, at that name blind folk can see, lame folk can walk, deaf folk can hear. At that name, the dead shall live again, at that name every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus Christ says to you and to me, if thou be a great people stand up, look up, get up into the hill country not in your name, but in my name. Live your life, realize your dreams, let your light shine, blow your trumpet, sing your song. All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all. Ye chosen seed of Israel's race. Ye ransomed from the fall. Hail Him who saved you

by His grace and crown Him Lord of all...Hail Him who saved you by His grace and crown Him Lord of all...

Class Assignment

1. Provide a written critique of "If Thou Be A Great People!"

Case Studies

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Charles Gilchrist Adams

The preaching ministries of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Charles Gilchrist Adams, pastor of the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan, deserve attention and examination as examples of the best of preaching on social issues. From the very outset of their ministries, King and Adams embraced the notion of preaching about personal salvation and social evangelism. These case studies provide some insight into the influential factors that led King and Adams to preach as they did.

Note: In addition to discussing the case studies, the class read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon, "A Time to Break Silence," delivered one year to the date (4 April 1967) from his death in Memphis, Tennessee. This sermon was delivered at the historic Riverside Church in New York City. The class listened to an audiotape of Charles Adams' sermon "Drunk on the Eve of Reconstruction." Although Dr. Adams has preached this sermon on many previous occasions, this time the sermon was delivered at the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, in preparation for a conference on Economic Justice at Harvard Divinity School in 1994.

Case Study I

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Any conversation about the role of preaching on social issues must begin with Martin Luther King, Jr. In August of 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C., Dr. King preached to this nation and the world his "I Have A Dream" sermon, which became for this nation the clarion call for the sermon as public discourse. While many have often characterized Martin King as a civil rights activist, a prolific orator, a scholar and even a "negro" leader, it was King's role as a Baptist preacher, deeply steeped in the traditions and teachings of the Black church, particularly the Black church with southern roots, that gave his messages and sermons their prophetic, moral, spiritual and ethical content and context. Cornel West, in his book *Prophetic Fragments*, speaking of Martin Luther King as a prophetic Christian and organic intellectual, makes it clear that it was King's involvement in and connection to the Black church that was most influential in his thought and action:

Martin Luther King, Jr. was the most significant and successful organic intellectual in American history. Never before in our past has a figure outside of elected public office linked the life of the mind to social change with such moral persuasiveness and political effectiveness. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a child of the black church--an individual product of the major institutional product of black people in this country.²⁴

²⁴Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 3-4.

It was in the Black church, listening to the preaching of his grandfather, the Rev. A. D. Williams, and his father, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., that King began to shape his theological, ethical, and moral worldview. Those scholars, writers, biographers and commentators who have chronicled the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and thereby, the Civil Rights movement, agree that there were at least four formative factors that shaped and influenced the life and the thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. They were: (1) his early years spent in the security, safety and segregation of Atlanta's middle class society on Auburn Avenue; the son, the grandson and the great-grandson of Baptist preachers; (2) his undergraduate years at Morehouse College, where he encountered Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays and Professor George Kelsey; (3) his graduate studies at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, PA (now a part of Colgate/Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Divinity School) and Boston University where he was introduced to the writings of Karl Marx, Georg Wihelm Friedrich Hegel, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Rauschenbusch and many others; and (4) his introduction to the teaching of Mohandas K. Gandhi's satyagrahic nonviolent resistance movement.²⁵ For the purposes of this case study, we will look briefly at these formative factors, but study more closely the most overlooked factor, that factor being what Richard Lischer, professor of Homiletics,

²⁵Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 81-87.

at the Divinity School of Duke University, in his new study on the life of Martin Luther King Jr., entitled "The Preacher King." This much overlooked factor influenced King's commitment to the preaching enterprise and the notion of the African-American Church, and more particularly the pulpit as the best platform for organizing people to go outside into the streets of America's cities and bring about social change and effect moral behavior.

The Morehouse Years

At the tender age of fifteen, Martin Luther King, Jr. found himself on the campus of Morehouse College, the alma mater of both his father and grandfather. Martin King, Jr. had actually been on the Morehouse campus since the seventh grade, when he arrived there to attend the Atlanta University Laboratory School. Perhaps providentially, he arrived on the campus of Morehouse in the seventh grade at the same time as the new president of the Morehouse College, Benjamin Elijah Mays. While many writers such as King biographer, David Garrow, author of *Bearing the Cross*, believe that the influence of Dr. Mays is overstated, there is no question that this man, who declared that he was "born to rebel," had a considerable impact upon the life of Young Martin, as did the whole Morehouse environment. Morehouse College had long enjoyed the reputation of being the producer of male leadership in religious, business, political and civic affairs. Founded with generous contributions from the Rockefeller family, Morehouse, along with Spelman and Atlanta University, gave to the United States a critical mass of educated "negroes,"

who made their influence felt in Atlanta and around the nation. Although Atlanta University had the first Negro Ph.D. from Harvard University, in the person of W. E. B. DuBois, Morehouse College was "the place for young black men to go," both personally and professionally.

Ironically, this future Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Martin King, did not distinguish himself socially nor academically while at Morehouse. Most of the Spelman women considered him too short and too "brown" to be attractive, and members of the faculty considered him an underachiever. However, it was at Morehouse that King was exposed for the first time to "negroes" who were self-assured, confident and certain about making a place for themselves in this country. King himself admits that for the first time he was "surrounded by men and women who knew who they were and were not afraid of anything."

Something else began to happen to King on the campus of Morehouse College. For the first time, he began to think seriously about the Christian ministry as a future vocation. Heretofore, King had entertained thoughts of becoming a lawyer or doctor. For King, the ministry was viewed as an occupation for the untrained and unlearned. Further, King found himself increasingly dissatisfied with what DuBois referred to as the emotional "frenzy" of the Black church. But the piety and the teachings of his early years still held a deep meaning for Martin King. Although his father never "steered" King toward the ministry, it was in his heart that his first son would follow him into the ministry and into the pulpit of the Ebenezer Church. But the younger Martin, furthered his educational dreams. After

graduating from Morehouse College at the age of nineteen, King headed off to Crozer Seminary in Chester, PA to begin training for the Christian ministry.

The Crozer Years

Biographers of King, including Ira G. Zepp and Kenneth L. Smith, co-authors of *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, believe that it was at Crozer Seminary that Martin King really came alive intellectually. Introduced and exposed for the first time to the thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Rauschenbusch, Karl Marx and especially Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, King learned critical thinking and intellectual analysis. While at Crozer, King heard Dr. Mordecai Johnson, then president of Howard University in Washington, D. C., recently returned from a trip to India, speak about the nonviolent movement of Mohandas K. Gandhi. It was this speech that began King thinking about moving toward the pacifist tendencies that he had so deeply resisted when he heard A. J. Muste, a noted pacifist speak sometime earlier. It was, however, Reinhold Niebuhr and Georg Hegel who had the most lasting and profound impact upon King. King found Niebuhr's notion of Christian realism intriguing. Niebuhr's persuasive realism showed King "the complexity of human motives and the reality of sin on every level of human existence. But it was Hegel's dialectic that allowed King the vehicle by which he could move his intellectual arguments. Hegel's notion of thesis,

antithesis and synthesis allowed King to make any argument, examine both sides of the argument and resolve the argument.²⁶

Again, Martin King's theology was initially fashioned at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. It is impossible to understand King's theology apart from the Black religious experience. While at Crozer Seminary, King began to formulate his view of God, Jesus Christ and the church, in light of the new intellectual tools that he was acquiring. Coupled with the teachings of Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism and liberal theology, King's theology included such themes as justice, love and hope, all grounded in the Black church's faith in Jesus Christ. From the very beginning, King was not a theoretical theologian. He was a theologian of action and praxis.

The Preacher King

More than anything, Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted to be a great preacher. King repeatedly asserted his heritage and place in a preaching legacy, that included his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Whatever titles were ascribed to him throughout his public career, King always confessed that "fundamentally I am a Baptist preacher." From the moment that "Daddy King," Lucius M. Tobin and Samuel W. Williams officiated at the ordination of young M. L., he was deeply com-

²⁶Ira G. Zepp and Kenneth L. Smith, *Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 77-79.

mitted to personifying the best in the Black church tradition, as well as the theological and intellectual environments. Again it was King's use of the Hegelian dialectic that allowed him to synthesize these competing extremes.

In the pulpit King was able to bring all of the influences in his life, over the years, together in the "rise and the rhythm" of the African American preaching event. King loved the pulpit. This powerful orator who had once thought of becoming a lawyer, because of the power of words to persuade people, now found himself enthralled and enthused about the way "the Word" was used in the pulpit to move people. King was a powerful orator indeed.

But for King, the sermon was a beginning not an ending. It was a point of departure for spiritual and social transformation. Again, from his seminary days, King had embraced the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, which posited the belief that in every human being was the stamp of the Imago Dei, the Image of God. Therefore, humanity was capable of transcending its proclivity towards sin and fallenness, through the ethic of love. The ability to transcend personal sin in the individual, also made individuals capable of transforming corporate sin in institutions. This, for King, meant the breakdown of racial, political and economic barriers.

After King completed his course work at Boston University and after much praying and soul-searching, King returned to the land of his birth, the South, not Atlanta, but Montgomery, Alabama to begin a pastorate at the Dexter Avenue

Baptist Church. Later on, in 1960, King would help his father fulfill a long-held dream by joining him in the pulpit of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. In Montgomery at Dexter Avenue, King was stepping into the shoes of another pulpit giant, the Rev. Vernon Johns. Throughout his tenure as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Johns was often at odds with the "city fathers," the church deacons and the members of the congregation, because of his controversial and fiery sermons. Removed from the pulpit by police escort, Johns was known for preaching sermons that inflamed the community and embarrassed the congregation. When King came along, the Dexter congregation was looking for a minister who would be a radical departure from the confrontational Johns. They thought they had found that person in Martin Luther King, Jr.

King learned all that he knew about preaching from the Black church. During his time, there was a cadre of preachers whose preaching styles could be imitated. In Atlanta, there was his father and there was Dr. William Holmes Borders. There was the national presence of Benjamin E. Mays, Howard Thurman, Gardner Taylor and Mordecai Johnson. From J. Pius Barbour, he learned to synthesize the academic learning with homiletical eloquence. With all of these voices in his ear, King blended his seminary training.

In addition to these preachers of the tradition, there were white preachers who made an impact upon the preaching of King. Some of these preachers were Harry Emerson Fosdick, George Buttrick, Halford Luccock, and especially J. Wallace

Hamilton. So apparent was the influence of J. Wallace Hamilton, a Presbyterian minister, that some people believed that King preached his sermons word for word. Although that has been easily disproved, the influence of Hamilton is noticeable. In spite of these influences, King developed his own style, his own voice and his own sermons. He used skillful manipulation, metaphor and poetic language. It was the power of his language and the sense of urgency in his message. Throughout his brief preaching and pulpit career, King preached a small repertoire of sermons that incorporated the most important principles in King's life and thought. The Old Testament story of the exodus of the children of Israel, which spoke about the liberation of the Jewish people from the enslavement of an oppressive Black Pharaoh, undergirded all of King's social and theological thought. For King, the association of this story with the condition of the North American Negro, the oppression and the humiliation and the desire for freedom was the refrain of all of King's messages. This story unfolded against the backdrop of a God who was grieved by the suffering of the people and who willed that they should ultimately triumph. Every one of King's sermons embraced this master story of liberation.

Richard Lischer, in his article on Martin Luther King, Jr. written for the newly published *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, says:

Through the breadth of his appeal to Western values and his creative use of the Judeo-Christian tradition, King's rhetoric helped create a temporary consensus among people of good will in America. This priestly office of the word also entailed a prophetic confrontation with evil. King's prophetic words were

complemented by prophetic actions--marches, pray-ins, and arrests--the purpose of which was to isolate and expose the evil of American racism.²⁷

Further, Lischer writes: "Like no preacher in the twentieth century, King transposed the great Judeo-Christian themes of love, suffering, deliverance, and reconciliation from the sacred shelter of the pulpit into the arena of public policy and behavior."²⁸

Case Study II

Charles Gilchrist Adams

It was in 1975, during my student days at Bishop College in Dallas, Texas that I first encountered the preaching of Charles Gilchrist Adams. During the L. K. Williams Ministers' Institute, a week-long series of sermons and lectures by the nation's leading ministers, Dr. Adams preached sermons in the flesh using John 1:1-14. It is safe to say that this was the inauguration of my commitment to preaching on social issues. Dr. Adams' practical application of the biblical texts to the contemporary landscape ignited in me a desire to model my preaching in this fashion. I have never failed to hear Dr. Adams at least three or four times a year since 1975.

²⁷Richard Lischer, "Martin Luther King, Jr." in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), 290.

²⁸*Ibid.*

Born December 13, 1936 in Detroit, Michigan, the son of Charles Nathaniel Adams and Clifton Gilchrist Adams, he was greatly influenced by his grand-uncle, the late Gordon Blaine Hancock of Richmond, Virginia, who baptized him into the Christian faith at a very early age. Charles Adams attended Fisk University, where he was president of the sophomore class and vice president of the Student Council. He was graduated with honors from the University of Michigan and Harvard University. He went on to become a doctoral fellow at Union Theological Seminary in New York. On April 6, 1969, he was called to be the senior pastor of the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan. Charles Adams was a "son" of Hartford, having been raised, indoctrinated, baptized, licensed to preach, ordained for the gospel ministry and married in the church.

Hartford Memorial Baptist Church had long had a tradition of social activism and social evangelism under the leadership of the Reverend Charles A. Hill, Sr., an outspoken champion of civil rights in the difficult days before the Civil Rights Movement of 1955 and onward. Dr. Hill was one of the first Blacks to run for the Detroit City Council, and courageously opened the Hartford pulpit to such non-conformists as W. E. B. DuBois and Paul Robeson. Since Dr. Hill was a strong supporter of organized labor, UAW Ford Local 600 was organized in Hartford Memorial.

After seven years of serving as the pastor of the historic Concord Baptist Church in Boston, Massachusetts (the largest African-American congregation in

New England), Dr. Adams was ready to assume the leadership of Hartford. With a firm commitment to continue the legacy of Dr. Hill, it was not long before Dr. Adams was totally immersed in the spiritual, religious and economic life of Detroit. Dr. Adams' vision of community outreach led to the establishment of AGAPE (love) House for charitable and community ministries. AGAPE House offers needed social services such as medical referral, free clothing, daily senior citizens' program, hunger task force, bookstore, educational academies for boys and girls, a public health consortium, legal referral, a child visitation program for incarcerated mothers, W.I.C. Program, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Reach Program for AIDS awareness, education and support, and the Hartford Economic Development Foundation.²⁹

Dr. Adams' preaching is both indicting and intellectual; challenging and confrontational; convincing and combative. He is not afraid to use the Bible and the power of the pulpit to take on the "powers that be" and remind them of their responsibilities to those who have been locked out and left out. In 1992, he was called upon to address the causes and the challenges of the riot in Los Angeles, California that followed the Simi Valley verdict that acquitted the Los Angeles policemen who were responsible for the beating of Rodney King. He went on to recommend that the World Council of Churches (Dr. Adams is a member of the

²⁹Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, *A Brief History*.

WCC Central Committee) use its offices and resources to help combat racism in the United States and the world. Their response was to join the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. in a combined visit to Los Angeles in June of 1992. The two organizations converged upon Los Angeles to meet with churches, gang leaders, public officials, entrepreneurs and citizens, to listen to the community's concerns and to ascertain what must be done to bring about a lasting period of healing throughout the city of Los Angeles and urban America.³⁰

Considered one of the greatest and most influential preachers in America, Dr. Adams has served as president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention and the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He was among a group of ministers, politicians and community activists who made up the Ecumenical Urban Strategy Committee, whose program was presented and launched at a meeting of the General Board of the National Council of Churches in November, 1992 in Cleveland, Ohio. The new ecumenical urban strategy was presented by Dr. Adams to President Bill Clinton at the White House in March of 1993. In October of 1994, Dr. Adams was invited by President Clinton to accompany him to Jordan to witness the signing of the Peace Accord between Jordan and Israel.³¹ These wide and varied involvements give Dr. Adams the

³⁰Charles Gilchrist Adams, *Curriculum Vitae*.

³¹*Ibid.*

information and inspiration for preaching on social issues. I can think of no other preacher in America today who is as adept at synthesizing Christ and the culture as is Charles Gilchrist Adams.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS

The evaluation of this project was as follows:

1. Each student in this course had three opportunities to make presentations before the:
 - a. presentation of the project outline and sermon script; and
 - b. presentation of the project;
 - c. presentation of the final sermon in the context of worship.
2. After each presentation, students received immediate feedback from the professor and from their colleagues in the class.
3. After each lecture by the professor, the students were encouraged to ask questions and participate in classroom discussion.
4. At the mid-term point in the semester, students were encouraged to express their assessment of the course at that point.
5. At the end of the course, students were given the opportunity to evaluate the course in its entirety, e. g., presentations by the professor, assignments for the course, course time (Saturday, 8:00a.m.-12:40p.m.) and classroom environment.
6. Since this course was being taught at Union Theological Seminary and the Interdenominational Theological Center each for the first time, students were asked to evaluate this course in comparison with the institution's overall curriculum, other homiletics courses and courses in the Practical Field.
7. At Union and ITC, this course was evaluated through standing institutional channels.

At Union Seminary and ITC, interest in this course was very enthusiastic. The enthusiasm for this course created an exciting classroom environment. Students were excited about being able to design and develop sermons that spoke about real needs and social issues affecting the lives of their audiences/congregations. Whereas students at Union did not have many opportunities to preach (on the average of one Sunday per month), most of the students at ITC (with the exception of the female members of the class) were preaching every Sunday.

The workload for this course was heavy. The course was offered in the Practical Field to second- and third-year seminarians, doctoral students and auditors as a seminar course for thirteen weeks. The class met once a week for two hours and forty minutes. The format of the class consisted of assigned readings, lectures led by the professor and students, listening to audiotapes of sermons and discussions. The major project of the course was the development of a presentation by each student in the class, which focused upon their chosen social issue. The presentation was to be a twenty-page paper out of which a sermon was to be developed and delivered. Since there was much concern about the possibility of developing a twenty-page paper for a homiletics course, the number of pages was reduced from twenty to fifteen, although the average length for each paper was eighteen to twenty pages. In addition to these assignments, the students were required to read three books from the course reading list and submit three critical

reviews. As in most courses, the students felt the workload was excessive and made several suggestions for the reduction of assignments in the class.

Students expressed appreciation for the notion of building the sermon. This approach to sermon development allowed the sermon to be clarified and brought into greater focus before it reached the pulpit. The students acknowledged that the books that were most helpful for their work in the course were: *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* by David Buttrick; *Preaching As Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil* by Christine M. Smith; *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching* by Ronald J. Allen; and *Social Ministry* by Dieter T. Hessel. The book that the students enjoyed the most was *The Certain Sound of the Trumpet: Crafting a Sermon of Authority* by Samuel D. Proctor. Students expressed great appreciation for the seminar format of the course. Each student felt they had a real opportunity to get their point across, and felt that the opportunity to "bounce their ideas off" their colleagues in the class was most helpful.

In 1971, Fred Craddock wrote *As One Without Authority*, which introduced the inductive approach to sermonizing to the homiletical field. It is believed that the inductive model allows the listener/audiences to find their place in the sermon event/experience and thereby discover their action through the action of God.

The results of this project, the teaching of "Linking Texts with Contexts" and "Preaching As Social Commentary," proved that there is a great deal of enthusiasm in doing sermons a new way, preaching on social issues. "Preaching As Social

Commentary" was repeated in each of my remaining semesters at Union Theological Seminary, meaning that this course was offered a total of four times in seven semesters, with a total enrollment of 46 students. In the course evaluations that were offered during each of the final class sessions, students expressed appreciation for a new approach to sermon development, a port of entry for hearing the gospel through the prism of relevant social issues, and the challenge of fresh exegetical, theological, sociological and biblical analysis. This will be offered again at the Interdenominational Theological Center in the fall semester of 1996. I suppose that the greatest testament to the success of this course at ITC is that six of the thirteen students who took this course in the fall semester are presently enrolled in my course, "The Person in the Pulpit."

On a very personal note, the students at ITC expressed appreciation for the fact that as the newest member of the faculty and the seminary community, I did not feel that I had to come into the classroom to "prove myself." They expressed appreciation for the teaching pedagogy presented to them as well as a serious, but not stern approach to teaching preaching.

CHAPTER V

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: ANNOUNCING GOD'S ACTION IN THE WORLD

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep God's commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 NRSV

Clear and measurable goals enable persons to focus their attention and to establish their priorities. My personal and ministry goals have changed since the beginning of this project. When I began in 1989, I wanted to be the pastor of a growing church in an urban community. That was not to be the case. I discovered, however, that I have the gift of teaching and was able to develop a classroom pedagogy on the graduate theological level. Although I have not given up on the pursuit of a full-time pastorate, I am convinced that I can teach on the seminary level as well. The involvement in this Doctor of Ministry project has helped me to center my ministerial choices around the church, the academy, and the literary world. These goals that I have long held have been brought into greater focus and fruition through this project.

It is my hope that the undertaking of this project will demonstrate the importance of preaching on contemporary social issues and of linking the ancient world of the Bible to the contemporary context for the student preacher and for the

preacher practitioner. Further, I hope that the implications for such sermon development and delivery will provide a framework for sermons as messages for social transformation and social change. Personally, I hope to continue to refine this homiletical approach of preaching on contemporary social issues, linking texts with contexts both in the classroom and in the pulpit. In the academy, I hope to convince student preachers of the relevance of such a homiletical approach, to the end that they will embrace this methodology as a way of doing sermons and preaching in this world.

There is a great need now and in the future for men and women who preach to deliver relevant sermon from their pulpits. It is the responsibility of seminaries and Bible colleges, as well as those committed to continuing theological education, to see that their students are equipped and prepared to preach such sermons. Some seminaries have already responded. At the same time that I was teaching "Linking Texts with Contexts" and "Preaching As Social Commentary" at Union, Thomas G. Long was teaching "Preaching on Contemporary Social Issues" at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey. It is my hope that seminaries will see the need to include in their curricula courses on preaching that deal with the social issues of our day.

The model, "Linking Texts with Contexts: The Critical Form and Function of Preaching on Social Issues--A Homiletical Methodology," can be used in any seminary curriculum or in a Bible college. The course time, a thirteen-week period

was sufficient time for the objectives of the course to be realized. It is recommended that this course be offered to students pursuing the Master of Divinity, Master of Arts, Master of Religious Education, Master of Sacred Theology and Ph.D. degrees. It is not recommended for students in their first year of seminary who have not had an introductory preaching" course, an introductory Bible course or an exegetical course.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

PROJECT NEEDS ASSESSMENT: A NARRATIVE

(The following narrative represents random statements made by students, faculty members and visitors to the class, "Preaching as Social Commentary," during the fall of 1995 at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia.)

Needs Assessment: Narrative

What do you expect to get from this course?

"I want to learn to preach more powerful, effective sermons; sermons that connect with the people. I want to preach where the people are. I want to preach about the issues that effect people in their everyday lives."

"I want to learn how to do Expository Preaching" (how the course is listed in the ITC catalog).

"I preach every Sunday. I want to learn to preach in a way that will help the members of my church to understand what God is doing in the midst of their present situation."

"As a Korean student, I am concerned about the way preaching is done in my country. I will be going back to Korea after graduation. I want a way of doing sermons that will help me and my people in Korea."

"I want to see how this way of doing sermons is helpful to bringing people to Jesus Christ. I believe in preaching. We need to preach Jesus Christ and him

crucified. If the people see Jesus they will know what to do. I believe that we must preach Jesus."

"I believe that this is the type of preaching that we should be doing in our churches today. I am tired of people shouting all day on Sunday and being silent throughout the week. There ought to be a way of doing sermons that will help people live better lives."

"As a woman, I am interested in preaching sermons that will address the issues of women. I am not interested in sounding like a man in the pulpit. I want to learn a sermon methodology that is best suited for women preachers."

"I have taken Sermon Preparation and Delivery and I am still not sure if my strength is in preaching. I want this course to help me discover what kind of preacher I am."

"I am a graduating senior concentrating in Homiletics, yet I have not read many books on preaching. I am taking this course to broaden my knowledge and reading of preaching."

"I would appreciate a sermon methodology that moves beyond the standard "three points and a poem way of doing sermons."

"In my church, we are considered evangelists until we are ordained for the gospel ministry. I am on the road every weekend. I want to see if preaching on social issues will help in my work as an evangelist."

"I do not get to preach very much. I want to use this course as an opportunity to get preaching experience and exposure. I want to discover what my gifts and strengths in ministry really are."

"I need this class to graduate."

"There are some issues that I am very concerned about in my church as I approach graduation and ordination. I want to be able to use the Bible and the pulpit to address these issues. I want to help my denomination see its responsibility in talking about such issues as HIV/AIDS, homosexuality in the church, sexism and ageism in the church."

"I am working on a combined Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work degree. I want my preaching to help people in a practical way. I want to apply the Bible to our contemporary world. I believe that God is actively involved and concerned about the situations that we are in. I want to talk about real issues when I preach."

Describe your preaching and denominational experience.

"I am a Baptist. I have been a member of the same church all of my life. When I talked to my pastor about my call to the ministry, he stated that he did not believe that God was calling women to preach. Although I am a straight A student, graduating in May, my pastor still has not acknowledged my call or even suggested that he will ordain me."

"I am a Baptist. I have been licensed for the ministry for a number of years, with no progress towards ordination. However, I preach at my church once a month."

"I am a member of the United Methodist Church. I do not have much preaching experience, but I am going to be ordained in March."

"I am a Presbyterian. In our church, the process is very hard. We have always believed in a trained clergy. We have to take Greek and Hebrew and ordination exams. We have to take psychological tests and meet with an ordination council. I am presently the pastor of a rural church about an hour's drive from Atlanta."

"I am a member of the Church of God in Christ. I am an evangelist, a title given to ministers seeking ordination. I travel around a great deal, preaching at youth conferences and doing revivals. I want to be a bishop one day."

"I am a member of the Church of God in Christ. I am active in a growing congregation here in Atlanta. We recently broke ground for a new church building. I am the chairperson of the ministerial council at the church. I want to be a bishop."

"I am a member of the Church of God in Christ. Even though I am a male, I am greatly disturbed about the treatment of women in our church. If men can be ordained, why not women? Especially women who have been to seminary. I want to get my Ph. D. degree."

"I am one of four brothers, who are all Baptist preachers. We are a very close family, and all of the boys followed our father into the ministry. I am presently the pastor of a small congregation right outside of Atlanta. In May, after I graduate, I am to be called to a church in Atlanta."

"I am a Presbyterian, who was formerly Baptist. I left the Baptist church because it was difficult for women to advance in my church. I saw young men,

who had not been to seminary being called to major churches in this city. I was very angry about that. In my present church, I am very active in the ministry of the church. It is a progressive Afro-centric church. However, I do not get much opportunity to preach."

"I am from Barbados. I lived in Brooklyn, New York for a number of years. I am a member of the A. M. E. church. My pastor is very supportive. As you know, the A. M. E. church has a history of supporting women in ministry. I expect to be ordained after graduation, which is a year from now."

Evaluation: Narrative

Project Associates

The most helpful part of this course for me was:

- a. "I was excited about a fresh approach to preaching and the Bible. It was helpful to have a sermon method that allows our preaching about real issues. I learned a great from the readings and the lectures. I especially appreciated the feedback from the presentations of sermons. It is good to know, as preachers, that we are not competitors. We are colleagues."
- b. "I was able to make immediate use of that which I was learning in the classroom in the pulpit on Sunday mornings. It was good to have the advice and counsel from my colleagues in the class."
- c. "Listening to the sermon of Charles Gilchrist Adams really impacted my understanding of preaching on social issues."
- d. "This class was exciting as I knew it would be. I now have a new commitment to make sure that I do not ignore preaching on social issues in my ministry."
- e. "I enjoyed this entire course. I was excited about it when I read the course description. I am thankful that Professor Knight did not feel the need to 'prove herself' at ITC. Although she repeatedly expressed frustration at our arriving to class late, she was able to meet all of her

stated objectives for this course. To me, the paper out of which the sermon emerged was the best assignment. It made my sermon much better."

This course would have been better if:

- a. "We lost a great deal of time in this course because members of the class were never on time. What does 8:00 a.m. mean at ITC, 9:30a.m.? This was really frustrating for me because I was always on time. Professor Knight always had to wait for the members of the class to arrive."
- b. "There could have been more balance in the course. It seems as if social issues that were of greater interest were given more time, than others. Everybody should have been given the same amount of time."
- c. "There should have been more exposure to preachers who are actually preaching on social issues. Are there any white preachers preaching on social issues? For more exposure, this would have been better. It would have been nice to hear Professor Knight's sermon rather than reading it."
- d. "There was a lot of busy work. I was not sure how the critical reviews fit into the overall objectives of the course. It was helpful to be exposed to the books, but with all of the other work it was too much."
- e. "Saturday is not a good day to hold a preaching class. Too many of us have to preach on Sunday, and need the time for sermon preparation, not class assignments."

Class Participants' Evaluations

"Thank you for this new approach to doing sermons. I am glad that you are at ITC. I hope you will stay here for a long time."

"I really enjoyed being able to preach a sermon in the context of my own worship experience. I appreciate the way in which the classroom became the congregation and my classmates became colleagues."

"I really liked the way we were encouraged to use the Bible in preaching. Although I have had exegesis, I did not understand the way in which the sermon was to emerge from the exegetical outline. I have always jumped over the 'homiletical wall,' making the text fit whatever I was preaching about."

"I believe that this is the way that preaching ought to be done in the twenty-first century. No disrespect intended, but I want to preach a gospel that will empower African-American people. All of this 'whooping and hollering' just will not get it."

"I thank God for you coming to ITC. Welcome."

"The way that the class was able to bond together was most helpful. I have learned more about people that I have seen at ITC for three years in just one semester. I will always remember Saturday afternoon at Paschal's."

"Being in front of the class two times before I had to preach a sermon helped to give me the confidence that I needed at preaching time."

Pre- and Post-Evaluation

Students were asked to demonstrate their ability to preach on a social issue by preaching a sermon in the context of worship. The students were to demonstrate their understanding of building a sermon and the delivery of that sermon.

APPENDIX B

MODEL PRESENTATIONS

Mary Foulke, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, New York

Michael McQueen, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia

Shirley Reid, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia

Jesse L. Watkins, Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia

Brief Student Synopsis

Mary Foulke is a candidate for the Ed.D. degree in a joint program with Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University. She is a lesbian minister in the Episcopal Church, politically active in the Gay and Lesbian Caucus at Union Seminary.

Michael McQueen is a middler at Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a member of the Cascade United Methodist Church in Atlanta. Michael demonstrated tremendous interest in preaching on social issues. He enthusiastically embraced this approach to doing sermons.

Shirley Reid is a graduating senior in the Master of Divinity program at Interdenominational Theological Center. She is a Baptist woman in ministry, experiencing all of the frustrations of male prejudices, female opposition and personal uncertainties. Her paper and presentation were among the best in the class.

Jesse L. Watkins is a graduating senior in the Master of Divinity program at Interdenominational Theological Center. A tremendous preacher with years of preaching experience, Jesse came to the class with some very firm ideas about the role of preaching, the place of the Bible in the sermon, and the role that the gospel of Jesus Christ will play in transforming lives and society.

*These four models represent the breadth of this course both at the Union Theological Seminary and at ITC. It certainly would be beyond the scope of this project to try to include all of the projects that were done. However, it is important to note that many of the class projects were of the quality represented here.

Mary L. Foulke
Preaching as Social Commentary
Project Outline

"Encouraging Testing and Abstinence (from evil) in the Church"
1Thessalonians 5:16-24

- The Context of 1 Thessalonians, exegesis

Best, E. A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians.

Black's New Testament Commentary (ed. Chadwick et. al.), London 1972

Fiorenza, Elizabeth. "Claiming our Authority and Power," Concilium, vol. 180,
London: T.&T. Clark, 1985

Grayston, K. The Letters of Paul to the Philippians and Thessalonians. Cambridge
Bible Commentary (ed. Ackroyd et. al.), Cambridge 1967

Johnson, Luke. The Writings of the New Testament. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986

Meeks, Wayne. The First Urban Christians. New Haven: Yale University Press,
1983

- The Situation of Violence against Lesbians & Gay Men (and those perceived to be)

Berrill & Herrick (eds.). Hate Crimes. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 1992
(especially "Conceptualizing Anti-Gay Violence" by Joseph Harry)

Comstock, Gary. Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men. New York: Columbia
University Press, 1991

Green, Jesse. "What the Navy Taught Allen Schindler's Mother." The New York
Times Magazine. September 12, 1993

- What the (Presbyterian) Church is doing.

Bull, Chris. "Still Sparring over Spahr." The Advocate. December 15, 1992

Carey, John, et. al. Keeping Body and Soul Together: Sexuality, Spirituality and
Social Justice. (Louisville, KY: Offices of the General Assembly 1991)

Price, Deb. "Biblical Verse: Is it a Reason or an Excuse?" San Francisco Examiner.
August 24, 1993

- What the Church should be doing.

Gomes, Peter. "Homophobic? Re-read Your Bible," The New York Times.
August 17, 1992

Snyder, T. Richard. "A Different Approach to Unity" Divided We Fall: Moving
From Suspicion to Solidarity. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992

Mary L. Foulke
 Preaching as Social Commentary
 Project Presentation

SILENCE AS SOCIAL COMMENTARY¹

This project is designed to address one issue that most church members and clergy prefer to ignore and remain silent about: violence against lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people. It is designed for discussion among preachers, but could as easily be used with any group. Likewise, the form of the presentation could be used for other ignored, silent issues.

There are two assumptions that I would like to challenge in this project. The first is that silence is a place of neutrality, of not dealing with difficult issues. Some churches openly condemn homosexuality and any sexuality outside of traditional heterosexual marriage. However, more common in the Presbyterian Church are strange statements and a predominant silence. For example, homophobia is a sin...but openly gay or lesbian or bi-sexual persons cannot be ordained to lay or clergy leadership positions. Another example is that open, avowed, practicing (etc.) homosexuals are not permitted in ministry, but the Committees on Preparation for Ministry are instructed not to ask about the candidate's sexual orientation. A commitment to challenging sodomy laws was made at one General Assembly, and the church at the national level does do civil rights work for lesbian and gay people, but few are aware of this on the local level and if they are aware they prefer not to talk about it. It is futile to explain these positions in any detail because they really do not make any sense when put together. The point is that the Presbyterian church does not speak clearly to the issue of justice for lesbian, gay and bi-sexual persons; it openly

¹ please note that I do not intend to imply that all silence is negative; I am specifically referring to silence in the face of evil, or beliefs and feelings left unspoken because of fear. Silence is often a positive force, providing a space for unspoken voices to begin to speak (see Nelle Morton, "Hearing into Speech," in *THE JOURNEY IS HOME* Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) or sometimes simply a space needed in a crowded and noisy world.

discriminates against lesbian, gay and bi-sexual Presbyterians; and it is completely silent regarding violence perpetrated against anyone perceived to be gay or lesbian. While some in the church might be repelled by the actions of a Pete Peters (see attached editorial), the response is more often "thank God I'm not like that," rather than any action that would suggest that they really disagree on the fundamental issue. The Christian Right is broadcasting their message by satellite, and the Presbyterian Church is silent. In this culture, silence is an assent to the status quo; it is not neutral, but rather supports bigotry in whatever form is present in the status quo.

The second idea that I hope to challenge is that this silence does not hurt anyone. Above I hoped to point out the harm done to lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people by silence which perpetuates bigotry and violence. Yet silence also harms those who believe that hatred and violence are wrong, yet who remain silent (gay or straight). About the transformation of silence into language and action, Audre Lorde (Black Lesbian, Poet, Warrior Mother) writes of her fear of breaking silence, "But my daughter, when I told her of (this) topic and my difficulty with it, said, 'Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.'"² We are all afraid to speak about so many things, we are afraid of the pain that sometimes comes with speaking, but, in Lorde's words, "But we all hurt in so many ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death on the other hand is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words."³

² p. 42, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." in *SISTER OUTSIDER*, by Audre Lorde, Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984

³ p.41, *Ibid*.

I have chosen this topic not only because I am concerned that the church/preachers speak about issues of justice important to our times, but also because of the profound spiritual crisis that silence, an inability to speak about our belief, is both cause of and evidence of in many Christians, church bodies, persons and groups. This deeply spiritual dis-ease affects the minds, bodies and souls of individuals and communities. Lorde describes this life and death crisis another way: "We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid....While we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us."⁴

EXPRESSIONS OF HOMO-HATRED⁵ IN THE CHURCHES AN EXERCISE

Heterosexist and homophobic violence (a.k.a. "homo-hatred") is both blatant and subtle in our society and in most churches. As part of the institutional life in this country and many Western-European countries, oppression of persons for (perceived) sexual orientation other than heterosexual has been ignored and even supported by churches. People of good intent are confused, silent and fearful. One way to address such fear is to bring it to conscious thought. My hope is to enable participants to discover in the churches they love the participation in the perpetuation of anti-gay and lesbian violence. And, by God's grace, participants may be brought to illumination for the purpose of challenging such violence and creating, with God and one another, a new order of things.⁶

⁴ p. 42 & 44, Ibid.

⁵ A new term borrowed from Dr. Elias Faraje-Jones, Associate Professor of Theology, Howard Divinity School, Washington D.C., used in his paper: "Queer African in the Diaspora" given at Union Theological Seminary, November 7, 1993.

⁶ This exercise is adapted from WORKING FOR LIFE: DISMANTLING RACISM, by Dody Matthias. Lima, OH: Fairway Press, 1990

"A heterosexual and homophobic society is one in which social policies, procedures, decisions, habits and actions subjugate a people and permit others to have control over them....No society will distribute social benefits in a perfectly equitable way. But no society need use (sexual orientation) as a criterion to determine who will be rewarded and who will be punished."⁷

Imagine a totally heterosexual and homophobic church - it might not seem very difficult because there are many real-life examples to choose from. It should be as real as possible, but as homo-hating as can be imagined.

List as many specific aspects of this church that you can think of that make it the epitome of a homo-hating church (never mind for now that some churches would be proud of such a description).

1. What is the composition or make-up of the congregation? Who are the members?
2. Who are the decision makers? Who decides the policies of the church? What are some of the policies of the church (e.g. liturgical expression, theological/Christian education for all levels, who has opportunity for which jobs/positions in authority?)
3. How are decisions made?
4. How are resources distributed in the church, and how are others' resources received? Whose gifts/expressions/resources are received and valued?
5. What are any other characteristics of this church?

Real Life: Would this church support the following actions or statements?⁸

"The only gays or lesbians who may be ordained are those who 'no longer engage in a homosexual way of life,' the commission said."⁹

⁷ p.62. Ibid. quoting from "Institutional Racism in America." 1969 (out of print)

⁸ all the examples used are by and about white/anglo persons, and all but one are by and about men. While limited in obvious ways, these examples are clear in their perpetuation of violence and discrimination against gay and lesbian people solely because they are gay or lesbian. Violence against lesbian, gay and bi-sexual People of Color cannot be distinguished from racist violence, and violence against lesbians of any color cannot be distinguished from violence against all women. The examples show a clarity of purpose in violence against gay and lesbian persons, but are limited in illustrating the multi-dimensional oppression that exists in society (see below, summary of Comstock for further discussion).

⁹p.50, "Still Sparring over Spahr." by Chris Bull, THE ADVOCATE. December 15, 1992

"Each day when she arrives for work as manager of the Vintage restaurant in downtown Topeka, Kansas, Sharon York is greeted by a noisy group of protesters shouting anti-gay epithets and toting signs reading *God Hates Fags* and *No Tears for Queers*. The protesters, led by Fred Phelps, pastor of the Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, are there to demand that York be fired from her job....(York's) house has been plastered with eggs, and a neighbors car parked in York's driveway was spray painted with the words *Fag Cult*Phelps accused York...of contaminating food with HIV and seeking to 'force their unnatural, God-defying lifestyle down our throats.'"¹⁰

Two days after their son died from complications related to AIDS, "William and Barbara Oldham received a vicious letter from Phelps condemning their son. Part of the letter, which was also faxed to the local media, said 'Defying the laws of God, man, and nature, Kevin Oldham played Russian roulette with promiscuous anal sex and lost big-time.' In the letter Phelps said that members of his church would picket Oldham's funeral because THE KANSAS CITY STAR newspaper had 'made a hero of this filthy dead sodomite.'"¹¹

"There is going to be the death penalty for homosexuals....It's just a matter of who is going to die, and how many." - Pete Peters¹²

"On October 27, 1992, while on shore leave in Sasebo, Japan, (Allen Schindler) was followed into a park bathroom shortly before midnight by two drunken shipmates, one of whom, Airman Charles Vins, watched and occasionally joined in while the other, Airman Apprentice Terry Helvey, kneed Schindler in the groin, struck him in the face and then, cradling his head in the crook of his arm, punched him repeatedly while lowering him to the floor. There, Helvey began stamping on him with the heel of his foot, striking blows from head to crotch that resulted, according to the pathologist who performed the autopsy, in abrasions, contusions and laceration of the forehead, eyes, nose, lips, chin, neck, Adam's apple, trachea, lungs, liver - which was pulped 'like a smushed tomato' - and penis. The pathologist compared the damage to that of 'a high-speed auto accident or a low speed aircraft accident' and said it was the most severe trauma he'd ever witnessed - even worse than a case he'd seen of a man trampled to death by a horse."¹³

Ask:

Who benefits from this church? In what ways?

What are the consequences to those who are excluded/attacked? To those who do the excluding/attacking?

¹⁰ p.43, "Us vs. Them." by Chris Bull, THE ADVOCATE November 2, 1993

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² as quoted by Leonard Zeiskind in "And Now, the Hate Show." on the Editorial Page of THE NEW YORK TIMES. November 16, 1993

¹³ p.60, "What the Navy Taught Allen Schindler's Mother." by Jesse Green, THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE September 12, 1993; while there is no direct connection between this example of violence and church, the previous statements by the Christian Right are brought to their natural conclusion in this example.

What are the reasons for exclusion/attack?
 What would those who benefit have to give up? Why would they want to?
 What do people in a homophobic, heterosexual church have to gain by speaking out?
 How is this similar to your church? In what specific ways?
 In what ways is it not similar?

A CLOSER LOOK AT VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

A Summary of Survey and Analysis by Gary Comstock as Reported in *VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIANS AND GAY MEN*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991

"When the rate of anti-gay/lesbian violence in the lives of lesbians and gay men is compared to the rate of criminal violence experienced by the general population, the former is proportionately higher (statistics on lesbians and gay men do not include other criminal violence)...(and) results...show that lesbians and gay men of color are more frequently the victims of anti-gay/lesbian violence than are white lesbians and gay men." (p.55)

p. 68: Table 3.14 *Percentage of Incidents in Which Perpetrators Use Various Kinds of Language, in Descending Order of Frequency*

Female Victims (%) n=41		Male Victims (%) n=76		All Victims (%) n=117	
disparaged homosexuality	43%	disparaged homosexuality	21%	disparaged homosexuality	29%
was anti-woman, anti-feminist	36	boasted of heterosexuality	11	boasted of heterosexuality	15
boasted of heterosexuality	25	referred to God, religion Bible	2	was anti-woman, anti-feminist	13
referred to God, religion Bible	8	was anti-woman, anti-feminist	1	referred to God, religion Bible	4
was racially insulting	2	was racially insulting	1	was racially insulting	1
was ethnically insulting	0	was ethnically insulting	1	was ethnically insulting	1

The above chart shows that among incidents of violence where perpetrators used language, reference to religion, the Bible or God is the third or fourth most frequent use of language. However, there is no way to measure the motivation for the anti-homosexual or anti-woman or anti-racial/ethnic comments. Comstock concludes from the chart that religious belief is not a primary motivation for the attacks. I do not disagree with Comstock; the oppression of lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people is so linked with the social order, that it is difficult to imagine what religious bodies would decide if the social sanctions were removed. However, I would suggest that in the United States the church is so linked with the social order that homophobic and heterosexist church statements and actions (or inactions) support social sanctions and therefore condone attacks.

Perpetrators of violence against lesbians and gay men are most often strangers to the victims, majority are male (87% are male perpetrators who victimize gay men; 94% are male who victimize lesbians), almost half of the perpetrators are under the age of 22 (46%, compared with 29% of perpetrators of other criminal attack), 69% of perpetrators are white (among victims of color, lesbian/gay victims are more often (54%) attacked by white perpetrators than general population of color (17%) is attacked by white perpetrators); perpetrators of violence against lesbians and gay men more often work in groups, and less often use weapons than is the case in other crimes. Perpetrators are often not involved with other criminal activity. Motives are often not expressed as dislike for lesbians or gay men, rather they appear in the cases studied by Comstock to be as follows: conforming to social sanctions against lesbians and gay men; adherence and to loyalty to the police, traditional values, and the social order.¹⁴

"In summary, then, data about incidents reported in newspapers and magazines suggest that the primary reason for adolescent attacks on lesbians and gay men is recreational, and such activity is encouraged or permitted by social sanctions against homosexuality. The primary reason for adult perpetrators' attacks is to defend one's

¹⁴ summary of pp. 90-94, G. Comstock, 1991.

place in a social order that disapproves of homosexuality; and robbers attack lesbians and gay men because they are unprotected and considered unimportant in society."¹⁵

Comstock goes on to posit that violence against lesbians and gay men is a socio-political issue, not an issue of personal dislike or feeling. Gays and lesbians are perceived as legitimate targets which can be openly attacked. This attitude draws strength from the example set by most major social institutions, of which the church is often a leader, which continue to deny homosexuals the status of equals.¹⁶

UNDERSTANDING HOMO-HATRED AS A POWER ISSUE¹⁷

DEFINITIONS

Prejudice

- An unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought or reason.
- Any preconceived opinion or feeling either favorable or unfavorable.
- Unreasonable feelings, opinions or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature directed against a racial, religious or national group.
- Irrational suspicion or hatred of a particular group.
- Detriment or injury caused to a person by the preconceived and unfavorable conviction of another or others.

Heterosexism

- A belief that human sexual relationships are characterized by attraction to the opposite sex, usually involving the idea that heterosexual sexual relationships, most often as established in marriage, are superior to all other relationships and deserving of privileges and the right to rule others.
- A policy of enforcing such asserted right.
- A system of government and society based on it.

¹⁵ p.94. Ibid.

¹⁶ p. 118, Ibid., referring to the New York State Governor's Task Force on Bias Related Violence. March 1988.

¹⁷ adapted from Matthias, p.58 (handout)

EXPLANATIONS

Homo-hatred is manifested by:

...the power of heterosexual (and closeted gay) persons/societies/institutions to determine and enforce the norms and standards of behavior, practice, aesthetics, cultural contributions, etc., by which persons/societies/institutions will be ordered. Such norms and standards reflect a singular and dominant perspective and a world view that excludes and/or seeks to diminish the norms and standards of any other kind of relationship including heterosexual friendships, same sex friendships and romance, bi-sexuality, etc..

...the power of heterosexual (and closeted gay) persons/societies/institutions to have and/or to take resources (of any kind) and to allocate and/or redistribute them in a manner that continues to support the dominating persons/societies/institutions; and to deny and/or limit access to those resources to anyone outside the heterosexual norm (e.g. tax breaks, access to insurance, housing loans, etc.).

...the power of heterosexual (and closeted gay) persons/societies/institutions to blame all persons outside the heterosexual norm when they do not order their lives around such norms, standards and find it impossible to live without necessary resources and when they are victims of harassment, violence or other abuse.

Heterosexism/homophobia hurts the oppressed and oppressor. It dehumanizes and negates lives. Therefore heterosexism and homophobia is evil. To abstain or distance ourselves from evil, we must take steps to challenge and to change the structures as well as our own attitudes.

SUMMARY TABLE ¹⁶

	<u><i>Prejudice</i></u>	<u><i>Heterosexism</i></u>	<u><i>New Community!</i></u>
Who determines "acceptable norms and standards?"	I do and/or "my" group does	Heterosexual (and closeted gay) persons & society	Shared norms, mutually agreed upon standards
Who controls the resources? Who "takes" and uses the resources of others	I do and/or "my" group does	Heterosexual (and closeted gay) persons, society and power structures	Sharing of resources; redistribution of resources

¹⁶ adapted from Matthias, p.54

Who is perceived to be "a problem"?	"the other"	single women and men, gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people, prostitutes, transvestites, etc.	Those who deny diversity, deny access to resources and perceive the problem to be outside themselves.
Who has the power to enforce norms, to control resources and to blame "the other"?	Power limited to me and/or "my" group.	Heterosexual (and closeted gay) persons, society and power structures	Community/corporate responsibility; no group is blamed; shared power in norms & resources.

MANDATE FROM SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil.

Exegetical Summary

The first letter to the Thessalonians is generally agreed to be authentically written by Paul to the community of believers in Thessalonica as a substitute for a visit.¹⁹ Paul was concerned about the well-being of the community and their faithfulness to Christ. There is disagreement among scholars as to the intent and audience/readers of Paul's letter. The question of audience is of religious/cultural background (Jews or Gentiles following Jesus? or both?), and of position and authority (leaders or the general congregation, formal or informal structures of authority?).²⁰ The other debate pits the intention of proclaiming Christ against the founding and nurture of Christian

¹⁹ see Luke Johnson, *THE WRITINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986; and see also 1 Thessalonians 2:18

²⁰ see also Acts 17:1-10

communities.²¹ If these actions are not seen in opposition, it is possible to define Paul's intention as the proclamation of Christ to the end that the whole community is built up.

From the little evidence about the first century, it would seem that Jewish and Christian communities were very fluid. For example, E. Schurer describes the fluidity of the synagogue structures: "Strangely enough, no one was nominated to conduct worship proper: the reading of scriptures, preaching and public prayer. In the first century these were still performed by members of the congregation themselves, which accounts for Jesus and Paul being able to speak in the synagogues."²² Yet, as mentioned above, whether Paul was writing for Jews or Gentiles in Thessalonica is still questioned. While this debate is not one that will be considered in depth in this project, it is important to remember that at the time 1 Thessalonians is said to have been written (approximately 50 CE), there is no evidence that Christianity was much more than an extensive renewal movement within Judaism.²³

Chapter five of 1 Thessalonians sets the context for the expectation of the return of Christ "like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2), and the need to build up community and to expect the coming of Christ (vs. 11). The list of exhortations in verses 16 - 22, is possibly a poem on the Christian life, presumably meant to build up community in preparation for the return of Christ. It recommends constancy in prayerful activity. There is no separation between prayer life and a "secular life." Testing is also recommended. Evidently, there was talk about false prophets, and a

²¹ see for example: H. VonCampenhausen, *ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY AND SPIRITUAL POWER IN THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969; vs. T.W. Manson, *THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd. 1948

²² p.434, Schurer, E. *THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE AGE OF JESUS CHRIST*, vol.2. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1979

²³ Richard Norris, *THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY TO AUGUSTINE*, course given at Union Theological Seminary (New York), Fall 1986; and Raymond Brown, *SPECIAL MINISTRIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD*, course given at UTS, Fall 1987.

possible over-abundance of the spirit.²⁴ Yet a non-authoritarian approach is advised: Paul says not to suppress that which they might not like ("do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies," vss. 19-20), but to test everything - to hold onto that which passes the test (the good, vs. 21), and to abstain²⁵ from that which does not pass the test (every form of evil, vs. 22).

Paul preaches Christ to the end that the community will be built up and prepared for the end times. He is far from silent, he passionately exhorts the people to "return to a religion of passion - a way of being in which anything less than spilling over with the desire to know and do the will of God in our daily work and play, with righteous and active indignation at injustice, with careful caring for others and self, with courage to stand up and be counted - when it counts, spilling over with integrity in relationship and with awareness of our oneness with all aspects and persons of creation, filling up and spilling over with the Passion of Jesus."²⁶

BIBLISTUDY

1. Who is our audience for the hearing of these words today?
2. How does the exhortation to "test everything" inform our understanding of Biblical interpretation?²⁷
3. What exhortations should we use to proclaim Christ and to build up community? Should there be any reference to sexuality in such exhortation?
4. How should we interpret the verse "abstain from every form of evil" for our times?
5. How does this passage inform our response to violence against lesbians, gay men and bi-sexual people? What can/should we do as Christians?

²⁴ p. 237, K. Grayston, THE LETTERS OF PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS AND THESSALONIANS. Cambridge: Cambridge Bible Commentary, (eds. Ackroyd, Leaney, Packer), 1967

²⁵ The Greek word which is translated "to abstain" is from the root: *apero*, meaning to be distant. Therefore, *aperesthe*, would mean literally to distance yourself from.

²⁶ p.21-22, C. Heyward, OUR PASSION FOR JUSTICE. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984 (please note that Heyward is not referring to Paul in this quote, but to the Christian life. I find that it fits quite well with the sentiments of Paul.)

²⁷ Biblical interpretation is an extremely important part of the debate about Christian understandings of sexuality. I did not include information about Biblical interpretation in this project because of my focus on violence, about which there is less debate. However, the following resources are useful: Gomes, Peter J. "Homophobic? Re-Read Your Bible," THE NEW YORK TIMES, August 17, 1992; Olson, Mark. "Untangling the Web: A Look at What Scripture Does and Does Not Say about Homosexual Behavior," (pp.24-29) THE OTHER SIDE, April 1984; Spencer, Dan. "The Bible and Homosexuality," ACCENT, September, 1991; Wink, Walter. "Biblical Perspectives on Homosexuality," (pp. 1082-1086, vol. 96) CHRISTIAN CENTURY, 1979.

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And Now, The Hate Show

By Leonard Zeskind

INCREASING numbers of white supremacists are forsaking paramilitary encampments and cow pasture cross burnings to build a larger, more mainstream constituency. Some leaders of the extreme right have taken the technological leap to satellite television.

On Oct. 9, Pete Peters, founder of the La Porte Church of Christ in Fort Collins, Colo., launched "Truth for Our

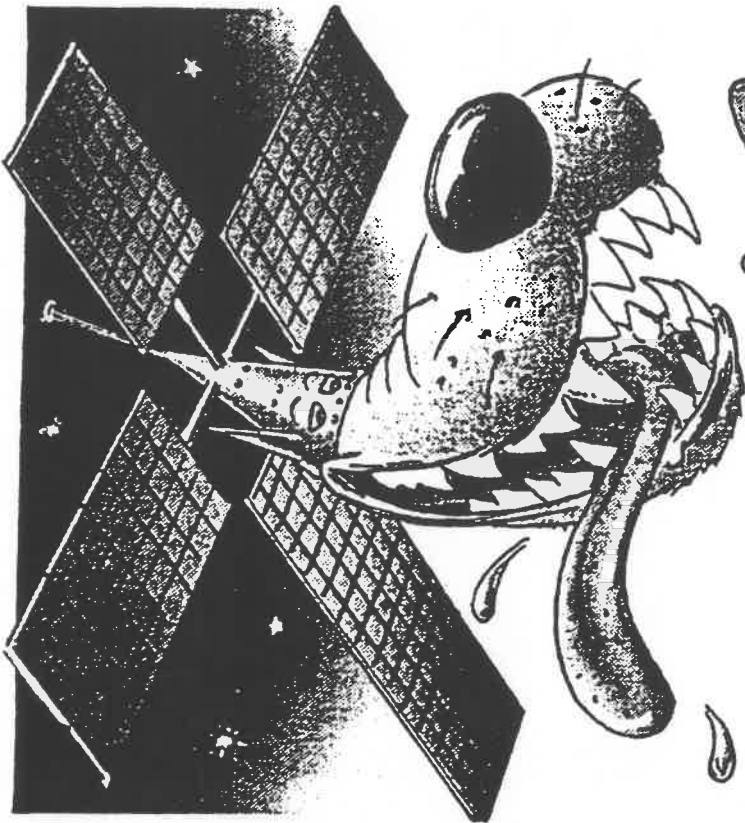
Christian Identity, via satellite.

Times," shown twice weekly on the Keystone Inspiration Network. A week later, he was followed by Ernst Zundel, a Canadian Holocaust denier.

Although there are no figures on the number of viewers Mr. Peters may be reaching, more than 14 million Americans have satellite receivers. His show is also on 65 local cable stations from Philadelphia to Sacramento.

The first program included attacks on homosexuals and gun registration. Mr. Peters pulled out a rifle and cocked

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Robert Grossman

supremacist movement and 150,000 more who attend meetings, buy literature or contribute money.

Many people still consider white supremacists a violent fringe phenomenon. The former Klansman David Duke's campaigns for the Senate and governorship of Louisiana show that that is no longer the case, as does Mr. Peters's use of satellite TV.

Mr. Peters's shift to the mainstream has paid off. In 1988, he was instrumental in defeating a ballot

it, remarking, "There is no sense having one of these if it's not loaded." Recently he touted a pamphlet he wrote criticizing Federal child immunization as a plot to "harm and destroy the children of God's people." The pamphlet quotes widely from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an anti-Semitic czarist forgery. On Saturday he said: "There is going to be the death penalty for homosexuals. ... It's just a matter of who is going to die and how many."

Mr. Peters is a leader in the Christian Identity movement, which claims that Northern European whites are the racial descendants of the Biblical people of Israel. He says that Jews are behind a Satanic conspiracy, that racial integration is a sin and that Armageddon will occur in the new promised land, America.

Christian Identity is a theological glue that binds together strands of the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis and so-called Christian patriots. There are about 25,000 hard-core adherents to the white

measure that would have prohibited discrimination against homosexuals in Fort Collins. The vote foreshadowed last year's approval of an anti-gay-rights amendment to Colorado's State Constitution.

Mr. Peters is emblematic of the dual character of the white supremacist movement: it is a violent subculture and a vanguard political cause. Lately, he has brought the two sides closer. In 1989, he was booed off the stage at a rally in Tennessee organized by Louis Beam, a leader of the Aryan Nations. At that time, Mr. Beam's bloodthirsty vitriol contrasted with Mr. Peters's less violent appeal. But a year ago, Mr. Beam was an honored guest at a conference organized by Mr. Peters in support of a Christian Identity believer, Randy Weaver, who was acquitted of killing a Federal marshal in Idaho.

Mr. Peters succeeds by harping on themes popular with conservative Christians. If violent white supremacists are to be kept outside the conservative tent, the Republican Party must lead in repudiating bigotry. Rather than appeal to the worst in us, as Patrick Buchanan did in co-opting David Duke's supporters in 1992, conservatives must drive white supremacists from the political marketplace with appeals to the best in us. □

Today I want to talk about abstinence and sexuality in the church. If you consider yourself conservative (and maybe if you do not know me very well), you probably think you know what I am going to talk about. If you are a liberal/progressive person your insides are probably already tying themselves in knots. However, my hope is to disappoint both reactions.

Hold fast to what is good, *abstain* from every form of evil. "Abstain" is the translation of the Greek verb 'apero,' literally to distance yourself from evil. It calls to mind another Pauline text from Romans 12:9, "*hate* what is evil, hold fast to what is good;" or in the King James II Version "*shrinking* from that which is evil, cleaving to that which is good." The Greek root being in this case 'apospao' literally to withdraw from evil, New Testament scholar Robert Jewett translates it as 'to abhor.' The case is clear whatever the translation, Christians are called to abstain, to distance themselves, to hate, to shrink from, to withdraw from, to abhor evil.

Yet the church in general, and the Presbyterian Church in particular has been timid in distancing itself from evil, fickle in its abstinence, wishy-washy in its withdrawal. In some cases, specifically in the case of sexual violence, we could say that the church has gotten Paul's words mixed up, we could say that the church has held fast to what is evil, and abstained from every form of good.

Let me explain what I mean. Violence against people perceived to be lesbian, gay or bi-sexual is both blatant and subtle in our society. Theologian Gary Comstock reports that the rate of anti-gay and lesbian violence is higher than the rate of criminal

violence experienced by the general population, and notes that lesbians and gay men of color are more frequently the victims of anti-gay/lesbian violence than are white lesbians and gay men, though the perpetrators are most often young, white men.

Such violence I name as evil; it is a visible cross-section of racist, sexist and heterosexist structures of oppression, and it is hateful actions by individuals and groups on behalf of the oppressive structures. Yet, as part of the institutional life of this country, oppression of persons for (perceived) sexual orientation other than heterosexual has been ignored and even supported by the churches.

The churches have said nothing to respond to the violence, and the churches have often continued to proclaim homosexuality a sin, and gay and lesbian people as unworthy of membership or leadership in Christ's body. The church has not abstained, the church has held fast to discrimination and violence.

Pete Peters, founder of the La Porte Church of Christ in Fort Collins, Colorado, has begun a television ministry in which he has stated, "There is going to be the death penalty for homosexuals....It's just a matter of who is going to die and how many." Many Christians prefer to ignore Peters and those like him; they prefer to see him as one individual - and a crazy one at that. The mainstream press often ignores stories of violence and threat, lending credence to the assumption that bias incidents are random and isolated. However, members of any target group communities (racial/ethnic, women of any race, lesbian/gay/bi-sexual, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) tend to know that violence and harassment are widespread, common and life-threatening. Yet we hear no Christian point of view other than Peters and those like him.

On October 27, 1992, while on shore leave in Sasebo, Japan, Allen Schindler, a gay sailor from New Jersey was followed into a park bathroom by two of his shipmates, he was subsequently beaten and stomped to death. The pathologist who performed the autopsy compared the damage to that of a high-speed auto accident or a low speed aircraft accident, and said that it was the most severe trauma he'd ever witnessed - even worse than a case he'd seen of a man trampled to death by a horse. There was no word from the churches to address this evil. There was no word from most pulpits on the following Sunday that would encourage abstinence from evil. The church has held fast to discrimination and violence.

This form of hatred called heterosexism and homophobia hurts the oppressed and the oppressor. It dehumanizes and negates lives. It is evil. To abstain or distance ourselves from evil we must take steps to challenge and to change our churches as well as our own attitudes.

Abstinence or distance from evil, or the stronger hatred or abhorrence of evil, has been described by one scholar as recalling the passion of parents protecting their children, or of lovers protecting their partners. The depth of our commitment to one another can be measured by the sense of horror we feel at seeing one another threatened - verbally or physically.¹ This distance, shrinking, abstinence from evil is a sign of our mutual concern for one another, it is a sign of holding fast to what is good, holding fast to the love that we feel for our sisters and brothers and lovers and friends and family, for the love that we feel for ourselves. Holding fast to what is good, and abstaining from evil are the same action - not two actions, but one.

¹ see Robert Jewett, *CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE: PAUL'S MESSAGE TO THE MODERN CHURCH*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982; as summarized by Michael Kinnamon. Dean/Lexington Seminary in an address entitled "Cleveland, Austin and the Meaning of Reconciliation."

Let me share an example - Michael Kinnamon is the dean of Lexington Seminary, a Disciples of Christ minister, and was nominated for the position of General Minister and President of his denomination in 1991. His nomination was defeated in a very close election largely by anti-gay and lesbian members who objected to his support for lesbian and gay people in general, and lesbian and gay ordination in particular. He writes, "Following confirmation of my nomination, I was invited to speak in about forty gatherings around the country....Out of all these meetings, however, only one moment continues to haunt me. It was in Cleveland. I had just finished making an opening statement and the floor was open for comments and questions. The first man to speak, a Disciples minister, started out rather blandly. I was vaguely anticipating where his remarks might go when suddenly I heard him say, 'After all, these people (meaning gay men and lesbians) are just worthless scum.' This is awful enough...but what really haunts me is that I let him speak. Indeed, I never denounced him."²

Kinnamon was trying to hold fast to the good, to justice for all people, to including lesbian, gay and bi-sexual people; yet he realized that his failure to distance himself from evil, to abhor the description of human beings as "worthless scum" had diminished his own humanity as well as that of the lesbian and gay people the statement was intended to describe. Sometimes it is difficult to stand up for ourselves, more often it is more difficult to stand up for others. Kinnamon shows that we are called to stand up, and that standing up for others is the same as standing up for ourselves.

² from Kinnamon, "Cleveland, Austin and the Meaning of Reconciliation."

He later reflected, "I suppose...I was caught off guard. At a deeper level, however, the question strikes at the heart of my identity and that of our churches. Like our churches I am deeply committed to (inclusivity). My life's work centers around reconciliation, an attempt to hold community together, to insist on hearing all voices. But isn't there something fundamentally impoverished about an understanding of reconciliation that left me unprepared to respond immediately and forcefully to this man?"³

Hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil. The church must take a stand against evil in our times. We must take a stand against evil in our times. In the face of brutal violence against lesbians and gay men, and in the face of actions and statements which support such violence from fringe elements and from within mainline denominations, we who call ourselves Christians must speak and act against such evil. We are called to hold onto the good, to love actively all people created in God's image, and for precisely this reason we are called to abstain, to distance ourselves, to hate those ways of acting, those attitudes of mind, the meanness of body and spirit that would threaten or devalue those whom God loves, those whom we love. It is one action to love and to defend the gospel, to hold fast to what is good and to abstain from every form of evil.

How shall we who call ourselves Christians live in the complexity that is our world, how shall we live in the midst of structures of oppression and individuals and groups who actively support such structures, willing to commit violence to protect the only way of life they have known regardless of its distortion of their own bodies and souls?

³ *ibid.*

Paul gives us his suggestion in today's passage, and I have added my interpretation: rejoice always! Do not be depressed, do not be heavy laden, but give thanks for all that you have; always take time out to reflect and focus your energy; appreciate those around you, admire and enjoy the signs of God's creation every day for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you; this is the friendship that God would wish to have with all people. Do not quench the Spirit, do not suppress your feelings and impulses to do good nor even those of others that you have questions about; do not despise prophecies or shield yourself from challenges, but test everything. Actively investigate the world with a curious and critical spirit; question all assumptions. In your investigation, hold fast to what is good - to all that God has created. Love God's people, love especially Jesus and look for him especially among those most pressed by our times; protect all these people as you would your greatest love or your only child. Abstain from every form of evil, distance yourself from those who would threaten or devalue those whom God loves, from those who would do violence to God's image in the world. Speak your anger against all who would offend the gospel in these ways.

Michael Kinnamon explains Paul's sentiment concretely when he reflects upon what he wished he had done: "What haunts me about the episode in Cleveland is that my actions there... betray(ed) a certain kind of relativism. 'All voices need to be heard. We need the witness of those who see things differently from ourselves.' Yes, unless the gospel of God's gracious love for all persons is threatened. At that point, my response should have been: 'Brother sit down! Such talk (referring to sisters and brothers for whom Christ died as "scum") has nothing to do with the good news we proclaim. Such talk has no place in a community of those who know that they are redeemed only by grace."⁴

⁴ *ibid.*

However, it is more than a living to protect the gospel. Paul's exhortation is not simply to a righteous life, but to a full life - a life lived in the present, in reality, with love, not without pain, but not distorted by fear and secrets, not isolated or lonely -- a life full of passions and loves, a life following Jesus. This is the life to which we have been called, to be lived concretely in reality with love, though not without pain, a full life following Jesus. It is not just about righteousness, it is also about happiness, about joy. To resist evil and to hold onto joy are one action.

I conclude with another exhortation of this sentiment, from lesbian theologian Carter Heyward who calls us to a faithful life of passion, to "a way of being in which anything less than spilling over with the Spirit of God is not enough; spilling over with the desire to know and do the will of God in our daily work and play, with righteous and active indignation at injustice, with careful caring for others and self, with courage to stand up and be counted - when it counts, spilling over with integrity in relationship and with awareness of our oneness with all aspects and persons of creation, filling up and spilling up with the Passion of Jesus. This is what we must be about within or without the religious institutions we have known."

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil. Amen.

Interdenominational Theological Center

Class Presentation

on

Economic Justice

CAM 850/02

Preaching as a Social Commentary

Professor: Carolyn Ann Knight

Submitted by

Michael T. McQueen

December 2, 1995

I. Introduction

There is in our society today, a serious and heated debate going on. This debate was started in the hallowed corridors of the White House, which then reverberated down to both Houses of Congress, and has now trickled down to the breakfast tables and workplaces of every citizen here in America. This debate is so important that its' outcome will affect well over 27 million people, or over 10% of the population of the United States, and well over \$200 billion dollars. (Info Plus, pg. 12). This debate transcends ethnic-socio-economic boundaries but, yet has a hideous stench of racism at the core of every discussion. The debate that I am referring to has to do with the current legislation regarding welfare reform in America. However, you may have heard it referred to as something else because it has been repackaged to make it look more appealing, and renamed to not make it sound so offensive. Welfare Reform has been given a new name by most Republicans in Congress and they call it their, "Contract with America."

In my presentation today, I will attempt to give you a brief history and overview of welfare reform; starting from its sincere and humanitarian beginnings, to the ugly debate that we have here in America today!

II. Why I chose this Topic.

I chose welfare reform as my subject under the heading of economic debate, because it is a topic that is dominating the political arena today and will continue to be a "hot topic" until the 1996 election and beyond, if no legislation is passed before then. Also, welfare is a topic that I am very familiar with because as a youth growing up in Philadelphia, Pa., I was a recipient of welfare funds and I have many friends and relatives that have benefited as well. However, the main reason why I am bringing it to your attention today is because, as I have stated earlier, this issue of welfare reform will have a major impact on the poor and the disenfranchised of our society, and unfortunately, I do not hear their voice being heard or communicated effectively to members of Congress in order to ensure fair and just treatment. That is why I have titled this paper. " Welfare Reform in America is it Justice or Just-Us!" I strongly believe that someone needs to hear their side of the story. I believe that the Christian community of today should respond to the plight of the poor, for indeed the Bible does record in Luke 4:18-19, that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said, " The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (NRSV, pg. 887-888).

III. History of Welfare Reform

Question? How many of you have received welfare assistance from the federal or state government before? Well , before you answer that question, let me

give you a quick definition and history of welfare and the term "welfare system."

The U.S. Welfare System as we have come to know it, is really no system at all, but rather a conglomeration of assistance programs established at different times, funded and operated by different levels of government and built on differing, and sometimes conflicting, political philosophies. Broadly defined, welfare includes any government assistance program where eligibility is determined on the basis of need; so called "means-tested programs." (Congressional Quarterly, pg.319).

Starting in 1962, Michael Harrington's book, The Other America, which dramatized the plight of poor urban ghettos and rural areas, influenced Kennedy administration officials to begin anti-poverty policies. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declares "unconditional war on poverty" in his first State of the Union address. Later that year Congress approves the Economic Opportunity Act, which contained job-training, community action and other anti-poverty programs, and the Food Stamp Act, providing food to the poor. In 1966, Welfare-Rights demonstrations in sixteen cities culminated in August of that year with the founding of the National Welfare Rights organization. In 1967, Congress establishes Work Incentive Program (WIN), which was aimed at cutting off benefits to adults receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), unless they accepted jobs or job-training. The program was generally viewed as a failure with few people placed in jobs and little savings in welfare costs. In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court overturns "man-in house" rules, which automatically cut-off AFDC payments if a man was living in the household. (Notice how this

insidiously causes the disintegration of the family structure, if a man, especially a Black man can not get a job!). In 1969, President Nixon proposed the Family Assistance Plan to provide financial payments to poor families, including the working poor. (CQ, 323). So, before we discuss the major developments in the area of welfare reform in the 1970's, let me sum up for you the political net result of all of the progressive legislation by the democrats led by Kennedy and Johnson. Basically, it caused a major conservative backlash which catapulted Richard M. Nixon to win the 1968 election for President. Here is a case where programs to help the poor, truly affected the mood of the general population in America and caused the nation to perform a political and ideological shift. Unfortunately, this trend of assisting the poor and disenfranchised of our society is not a very popular one and it has a history of damaging the image and even careers of individuals who appear to be "too liberal" in their ideology. This trend of being branded as "a liberal" is perceived negatively in most political circles. In 1972, the Senate rejected Nixon's Family Assistance Plan. In 1974, Aid programs for the elderly, blind and disabled are consolidated into federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is enacted to provide tax breaks for the working poor. In 1977, President Carter announces his "Program for Better Jobs and Income" to overhaul the welfare system, but legislation failed to advance in Congress. In summing up the 1970's, it seemed that any progressive plan to assist the poor was defeated, but the less controversial, (read less liberal) programs were expanded. In 1981, Congress approves the Omnibus Budget

Reconciliation Act containing provisions President Reagan requested to cut AFDC benefits for the working poor and allow states to require welfare recipients to participate in work programs. In 1984, in his controversial book Losing Game, Charles Murray argues that welfare has made poverty worsen, rewarding dependency, joblessness, and out-of-wedlock childbearing. In 1988, President Reagan signs Family Support Act of 1988, requiring state-implemented education, job training and placement programs for welfare recipients. The 1980's in nutshell saw Ronald Reagan preside over an era of cuts in programs to help the poor, and welfare-to-work programs are established in most states. (CQ, 332). Now here in the 1990's it was finally determined that the welfare system needed an overhaul by both Democrats and Republicans alike. So, in the midst of our budget deficit, savings and loan bailouts, and overspent military budget, they want to try and save the nation's overspent budget by cutting aid to the very people who need it most. I don't know about you but, I think Dayman Wayans; formerly of, "In Living Color" sums up my position very succinctly, when he used to say, "Homey don't play that!"

No, don't misread me here. I want to make myself perfectly clear, when I say that I categorically and totally reject the House of Representatives' version of the Welfare Reform Bill, known as H.R. 4, and I do not totally agree with the Senate's version of the bill known as S.1120, however, I do agree with both Houses of Congress that there needs to be a major restructuring of the "welfare system as we know it today! I personally believe that any system that has the potential by its'

very nature to make individuals or whole classes of individuals, indefinitely dependent upon it, rather than God, is inherently wrong. This definition would also include such systems as state run lotteries. But, before we just indiscriminately slash the welfare budget, there are many other programs among the myriad of programs that the government offers that also need restructuring.

Now, having said that let me share with you some interesting facts and figures. Monies spent on "welfare programs" in 1990 totaled \$210 billion dollars. The breakdown in dollars and percent are as follows: \$86.2 bln. or 41.0% went to medical benefits, \$55.1 bln. or 26.2% went to cash aid, \$25.2 bln. or 12.0% went to food benefits, \$17.5 bln. or 8.3% went to housing benefits, \$14.3 bln. or 6.8% went to education aid, and \$11.7 bln. or 5.7% went to the other category. (CQ, 319). The current welfare debate tends to focus on cash-assistance programs which is the \$55.1 bln or 26.2% of the total welfare budget, and the major debate within this area centers around Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The AFDC portion accounts for 47.5% of the cash aid budget. Currently, the federal government pays a little over half of the cost of the program. The states pay the rest, define standards for eligibility and set the level of benefits, which in 1990 was, \$120.00 per month for a family of three in Mississippi to \$924.00 per month in Alaska. The average monthly payments per case in 1990 was \$377.00. (CQ, 319). The next two largest of the cash aid expenditures are the SSI and the EITC. The SSI payments affect three categories of poor people: the elderly, the blind, and the disabled. The EITC is a form of negative income tax designed to

assist families with incomes up to \$21,250.00. The credit maximum is \$2000.00. (CQ, 319). Now, you may be wondering after hearing all of these facts and figures why is there such a major debate going on over welfare reform, because there does seem to be a legitimate need for all of these programs? Well, there may be a need, but let me share with you one more glaring and sobering statistic. From 1990 to 1992 the total expenditure for welfare increased by more than 38%, from \$210 bln. to \$290 bln. dollars. (Statistical Abstract 1994, pg.554). That's an \$80 bln. dollar increase in just a two-year period and to make matters even worse, it does not appear that these numbers will decrease unless something drastic happens. So, what we have facing us here in 1995 is a system that is getting larger and not smaller and that is fostering dependency instead of independency. Oh, by the way, if you have received any educational aid through Stafford Loans, Pell Grants, or Head Start, you have been a recipient of the welfare system. Now, let me ask you the question again, "How many of you have received welfare assistance? This question was not meant to embarrass anyone, but it is merely to make you aware of the potential impact this bill will have on the lives of many Americans that would not fit in the traditional "poor" category. We will discuss this "potential impact" later on in our discussion.

IV. Current Welfare Reform Bill and the Debate

Now, that I've given you a brief overview of the sixty-year history of the welfare system here in America. Let's listen to some of the comments by fellow House of Representatives members regarding the revised version of the Welfare

Reform Bill. Republican, Ways and Means Chairman, Bill Archer , said, " That the welfare overhaul would reverse the decades-long federal policy of rewarding unacceptable and self-destructive behavior. We will no longer reward people for doing the wrong thing. Democrat, Sam Gibbons said, "This is a cruel piece of legislation. It punishes the children, the innocent children, because of the errors of the parent or parents. It would deprive them of the basic necessities of food, of housing, of education of love. Republican House Economic and Education Opportunities Committee Chairman, William F. Gooding said, " Generation after generation we have enslaved these people. Unless we make a change, they will never get an opportunity to achieve the American dream. And finally, one debate became so heated that Democrat John Lewis made comparisons of the intent of this bill and Nazism and Republican E. Clay Shaw denounced the comparison as an "absolute outrage." (Washington Post, pg. a01).

Economic Impact of the Welfare Reform Bill

Now, let us take a closer look at the House version of the Welfare Reform Bill in order to see the economic impact that its' passage would have on our society. "The revised version of the welfare overhaul legislation that House Republicans proposed in their " Contract With America" would modify 40 federal programs that benefit more than one in ten Americans and give states considerable more control over public assistance; the changes would extend far beyond the main welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and affect food stamps, school lunches, disability payments, foster families and nutrition

supplements for pregnant women and infant children. The legislation would terminate the federal guarantee of benefits to poor families eligible for AFDC and deny cash support to unmarried teenage mothers, families with a parent not in a work program within two years and all families after five years on the rolls. Families that had more children while on welfare no longer would get extra benefits. The main welfare program (AFDC), would be combined with other cash assistance and work programs into one of five "block grants", or lump-sum payments that states could spend with comparatively few federal strictures. Federal rules of eligibility, for instance would be repealed." (Wash. Post pg. a01).

In a nutshell what they are proposing to do is to consolidate approximately 336 programs down into roughly 8 "block grants" and at the same time give the conservative Governors around the country, "carte blanche", in determining who and how many people receive benefits. I also want you to know that this bill, H.R.4 has already been passed in the House of Representatives, and the sad commentary is that, the people who will be impacted the most, are not even aware that it has passed the Republican dominated Congress. Now, let us briefly discuss the Senate's Bill S.1120. The Senate voted 87 to 12 to endorse "a welfare reform bill that would end the entitlement of benefits to AFDC and at a governor's option the Food Stamp Program. The bill would also set a lifetime limit on the receipt of welfare benefits of five years, require recipients to work after two years, or earlier at the state option, and save approximately \$70 billion dollars over seven years." (Nations Cities Weekly, pg.5 (1)). Even as I speak to you this morning, both the

House and Senate versions are being hammered out in conference. The good news is that President Clinton and Senate democrats did say that, " they will oppose the final legislation if it too closely resembles the House version of welfare reform, which they have stated " punishes innocent children". " (Nations Cities Weekly, pg.5(1)).

Hidden Agenda

In my studies here at I.T.C., my professors in Biblical studies have ingrained in my mind to always ask myself the question, when reading any material, "What was the purpose or the agenda of the writer. They also said that there is always an agenda, whether stated, implied, or hidden, for it was this agenda or purpose that caused the material to come into being. Therefore, I have come to this conclusion regarding welfare reform, and that is, the issues of " race and racism" are at the core of both pieces of legislation. Yes, I strongly believe that the hidden agenda in the current debate has racial undertones and thus is the "real motivation" behind this expediency to overhaul the welfare system. I know this sounds hard and I know that the cry of racism is often used to mask some issues that are clearly not race related, but you do not only have to believe me, but also listen to Andrew Hacker, who is the Jewish author of the book, Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal, and the editor of the conservative newspaper, " The Nation".

He writes in the July 1995, edition, " A near consensus is emerging that solicitude and sympathy haven't worked. Hence the calls for tougher measures to curb

dependence and irresponsible reproduction. Of course, those proposing these policies say they are race-neutral. The drive to make single mothers work will apply to everyone on the welfare rolls. Similarly, the new prisons being built will be filled by whatever people the courts decide belong there. Even the campaign against affirmative action emphasizes that it favors the ending of preferences based on gender and national origin. Yet despite these assurances, there can be little doubt that the chief targets of the crackdown are members of this country's principal minority race." (The Nation, pg. 45). So, Congress is saying that to curb dependence we are going to force mothers to work, which on the surface, seems like a very innocuous request. However, we all know that when welfare mothers are mentioned, the image of black women immediately are envisioned in the mind of most people, but very few people are aware that white women make up approximately 40% of the rolls of AFDC. (Information Plus, pg.61). But it is this image of a lazy black mother on welfare, which I might add is supported by the media, that is in the minds of most lawmakers today. The other issue that Congress wants to address is " irresponsible reproduction." But, according Mr. Hacker, he says that, " irresponsible reproduction", can be translated (by those in the know) as " too many black babies," and the real issue here is that they want to control or discourage black births." (The Nation, pg. 45). He further says that, " of course no one puts it that boldly (or bluntly). But statistics do not lie. He asserts that even though very few people study statistics, white Americans must be aware that they are not reproducing themselves. Replacement or zero growth

requires that every 100 women have 211 children. At present each 100 white women are having 197 children. The comparable figure for black women is 247, which happens to be an all-time low, but it is still large enough to increase the black population." (The Nation, pg. 45). However, he does say that the "concern for babies being produced out of wedlock is a legitimate one. Currently 18 percent of white births are to unmarried women. The figure for black births is 68 percent, and in cities like Baltimore and St. Louis it exceeds 80 percent. Few people will disagree he concludes, that people should not create babies if they lack the resources to rear them responsibly. But there is a corollary to this logic, one widely felt but seldom stated: that a lot of black births should not be taking place at all." So now that we know that this welfare reform overhaul has the stench of racism on it, and that Congress wants to curtail black growth, the question is what do we do about it?

Our Response

Well, the first thing we as preachers, teachers, and theologians should do is pray and search the scriptures to see what God's possible response would be for this situation. There may be many examples, but I suggest that we look to the gospel of Luke specifically, Lk. 4:16-19, to find how God addressed a similar situation where the poor, the blind, the oppressed and the marginalized were overlooked also. In our text we find that God sent and anointed Jesus of Nazareth to: " bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of

sight of the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (NRSV, pg.888). When we read Luke's story of Jesus ministry we will find that Jesus prepared his disciples to perform the same mission for which he was sent. Therefore, I submit to you my brothers and sisters, that we as Christians and disciples for Christ have a responsibility to proclaim release to the captives and the year of the Lord's favor. I further submit to you that we can do this by first going to where the people are and finding out what there needs and concerns are. That means that you are going have to talk and meet the people who would be affected most by this bill on their level. We also need to proclaim and make people aware of what's happening in Congress and how this legislation will affect 1 out of 10 Americans in this country, and that it will have the greatest impact on black people. We need to immediately start developing strategies and implement programs and yes, even new ministries in quite a few churches, that will address the needs of mothers who will need: daycare services, in order for the them to take the time to train and look for work; temporary financial assistance if an when their aid runs out after two to five years; temporary shelters if and when mothers get evicted for not having money to pay rent; health screenings for children; and most importantly, spiritual guidance to help them understand their need for a Savior, especially in times like this.

Conclusion

So in conclusion, my brothers and sisters, welfare reform is here and will come to pass. We have the biblical model to follow in the person of Jesus Christ.

There are people out there, the poor, the homeless, the helpless, and the hopeless, who need to hear from us. There is a Congress in Washington, D.C. who need to hear from us. Finally, I close by asking you the question, "Welfare Reform in America, is it Economic Justice or is it Just-Us?"

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Interdenominational Theological Center

Sermon
on
Economic Justice

Preaching as a Social Commentary

CAM 850

for
Professor: Carolyn Ann Knight

Submitted by

Michael T. McQueen

December 15, 1995

Topic: Economic Justice

Pericope: Luke 4:16-30

Text: Luke 4:16-21

Title: "Economic Reform in America, is it "Justice" or is it
"Just-Us?"

In today's society, there is an ever widening schism between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots, Whites and Blacks. Discrimination and prejudicial attitudes have come out of the closet and unto our very door steps. Just recently the whole nation not only bore witness to this schism, but in actuality was an active participant in the O.J. Simpson trial. We witnessed a nation split on the reaction to the not-guilty verdict handed down by a predominantly Black jury, where most white people felt believed O.J. was guilty and where most black people felt believed justice was served. In the house of the Senate today, there is a bill which has just recently been passed which will radically affect and disenfranchise millions of people who cross various ethnic-socio-economic lines. In their eyes it is only President Clinton's veto power that can save them from the affects of the ominous bill. This bill like the O.J. Simpson case has our nation once again split not only along party lines, (Republican and Democrat), not only along racial lines, (Whites and Blacks), but also along economic lines, (Rich and Poor). You have on one side people arguing that our nation needs to balance the budget,

and that this bill is economically just, and on the other side the disenfranchised; the poor, the homeless, lower-income Black and White people, and the elderly, say this bill is economically unfair. The poor cry out from their dilapidated homes and projects, but no one in Washington, D.C. can hear them. But, as I walk the streets of urban America, I can hear them. Can you hear them? Have you been listening? They cry out asking the question, "Economic Reform in America, is it "Justice" or is it "Just-Us"; who will feel the brunt of the passing of this bill? It is this cry by the poor and the elderly and the left-out members of our society that reverberates in the ear of America, but it seems like no one is acting like they hear their cry, It is this cry that we who call ourselves Christians must acknowledge and most act upon, if in fact we truly are a community of faith who emulate the life and ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because it is here in our text, Lk.4:16-21, that we find one of Jesus' main purposes for coming into this world. It is here also that we too should rediscover our reason for calling ourselves a community of faith and see that the community that Luke was addressing, is very similar to the one that we find ourselves confronting everyday here in America and also here in the city of Atlanta in 1995.

Permit me, if you will, to share with you some glaring statistics regarding the poor and those on welfare in America. As of the last census performed in 1990, there were 249 million

people here in America. The approximate racial breakdown was as follows: 206 million Whites, 30 million Blacks, and 13 million Hispanics. The respective percentages were: whites-80%, blacks-12%, and hispanics-8%. Now as we look at those below poverty level, we find that there were: 22 million Whites or 10% of the total white population, 9 million Blacks or 32% of the total black population, and 6 million Hispanics or 26% of the total Hispanic population. Monies spent on "welfare programs" in 1990 totaled \$210 billion dollars. The current welfare debate tends to focus on cash-assistance programs which is the \$55.1 billion or 26.2% of the total budget, and the major debate within this area center around Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The AFDC portion accounts for 47.5% of the cash aid budget. Currently, the federal government pays a little over half of the cost of the program. Also, Blacks account for less than half of those people on welfare; 40.1% are Black, 38.4% are White, 15.9% are Hispanic, and 5.6% are in the "Other" category. As I read these ominous statistics and as I travel the streets of Atlanta, I see Perry Homes, Carver Homes, Techwood Homes, and Grady Homes, and then I ride a little further I see Cascade Heights, Niskey Lake, Sandstone Shores, and all the other upscale Black and White neighborhoods in the city, I ask myself the question does anyone hear the cry of the poor? So as I prayed, God led me to our roadmap of life, called the Bible and I found two text; Lk.4:16-21, and James 2:1-7. Turn with me as I read it

aloud. (Read James 2:1-7). What James is saying to us today is that: "We get more excited and pay more attention to the Herman Russells and Bill Gates when they come around us while we pay no attention to the poor who are always around us? He says it is the rich people of the world who take you to court, but he says "it is the poor who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. But he says, you, that means you and me, dishonor the poor by ignoring them!" My brothers and sisters have you been ignoring the presence and the cry of the poor???

As we look at our main text today (Lk.4:16-21, we find Jesus going to back to where he was brought up, back to the place where he stood in the synagogue in the middle of the religious, pious, and self righteous people of his day worshipped. Luke then says that, "He unrolled the scroll and he found the place where it was written: (Read Lk.4:18-21). This passage in Luke is unique among the other gospels, but we do have a similar passage in the O.T. book of Isaiah 61:1-2. From analyzing this passage we find that Luke redacted the material in Isaiah to emphasize and specifically address the needs of the poor and the oppressed, and that liberation (setting the captives free) was a major goal. Now that we understand the major theme of our text let us look at it and see how this passage applies to us today. I think an article that I read in St. Mark's review, Sept. 1985 issue says it best when it said that, "Preaching the good news to the poor requires ensuring that they have enough to eat, a comfortable

place to live and accessible, effective health services as well as letting them know that they can be forgiven. Proclaiming release to the captives involves working for their restoration to wholeness by enabling them to experience the love of others so that they can learn to love God and themselves, as well as working for the release of prisoners. Setting at liberty those who are oppressed requires working to reduce oppression of all forms, wherever it exists, nationally, in the economy, in families, and in ourselves. This requires forms of community organization in which everyone is able to share freedom and responsibility. Full expression of Jesus' teaching includes commitment to the goals of adequate food, clothing and housing, the opportunity for productive work and enlivening leisure, the experience of a supportive and just society and freedom from the fear or destruction of war for everyone in the global community." Therefore, I submit to you my brothers and sisters, that we as Christians and disciples for Christ have a responsibility to proclaim this "good news" to the poor and also to proclaim that this year, 1995, is the acceptable year of the Lord's favor to all the people. We need to proclaim and make people aware of what's happening in Congress and how this current legislation will affect 1 out of every 10 Americans in this country. We need to immediately start developing new ministries that will address the needs of mothers who will eventually need; daycare services for their kids, temporary housing and financial assistance, health

screenings and most importantly spiritual guidance to help them to understand their need for a Savior.

Can you hear their cry? I know I can!, and I know God hears their cry. You see there is an old Hebrew word Se'aquáh, which is a cry of distress to God. And tradition has it that whenever God hears this cry, God responds! So, as we look at evidence of this cry throughout the Bible we find God sitting high and looking low as God's ears hear that audible cry. We find that God heard the cry of Able's blood, and God responded. We find that God heard the cry of the Nation of Israel when they were in slavery, and God sent Moses. We find in Psalm 99:6-7, that Moses, Aaron, and Samuel cried out to the Lord, and God answered them. It says that He spoke to them in the pillar of a cloud. We find that between the books of Malachi and Matthew there was a 400 hundred year period, called by scholars, "The Silent Years." But even though they seemed silent to us God continued to hear the cry of humanity. And the Bible says that; "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son." Yes, it was Jesus who God sent to save and set free all who were in bondage, and before Jesus left he said, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you! So my brothers and sisters, Jesus who was sent by God to proclaim and to release and set free, now sends you and I to do the same. So, in conclusion, we know that welfare reform is here and will come to pass. We have the biblical model to follow in the person of Jesus Christ. There are people out there, the poor, the

homeless, the helpless, and the hopeless, who need to hear from us. There is a Congress in Washington, D.C. who need to hear from us. Finally, I close by asking you the question, "Welfare Reform in America, is it Economic Justice or is it Just-Us? Amen!

"Sexism In Society And Church"

Social Issues Project

Outline

Submitted To

Rev. Carolyn Knight

By

Shirley Reid

For

CAM 850/02 Preaching as Social Commentary

Fall Semester, 1995

Interdenominational Theological Center

Atlanta, Georgia

"Sexism In Society And Church"

Outline

I. Introduction

This paper will look at historical and current examples along with causes and effects and possible means of eliminating sexism in society and church in the Black community and church as well as in the larger community and church. The basic premise is that any form of sexism is against the teachings of God as indicated in Genesis 1:27, Galatians 3:28, and the examples of Jesus Christ. However, many incidences of sexism still prevade the church as well as society. Therefore, it is encumbered upon the church as Christ's representatives to take the lead in following Christ's examples by showing no partiality in its treatment of all of God's children.

This topic is of interest to me because of personal experiences as a female minister with sexism in the church. In the church, there has been no effective way to deal with sexism on a level that matches the equal opportunity laws and grievence processes in the work force. In fact, leaders in the church have used scriptures to justify sexism.

Thus, to this issue, I bring my own personal experiences, experiences of others, and my belief that sexism is on the same level with racism and classism. Over and against the laws and customs of the times, throughout biblical history God gives examples of females in significant leadership roles.

Therefore, it is my contention that this issues should be addressed in sermons as against the teachings of God. We who love

Jesus must follow him all the way. So, as seminarians, if no one else does so, we must stand up for what is right. We must be examples of God's inclusiveness for all humankind.

It is thereby hoped that this paper will not only add to my personal knowledge, but that it will also help to alert others to the sin of sexism and some methods of eliminating it where we can.

- II. What Is Sexism?
- III. What Are Some Indications Of Sexism In Society?
 - A. Historical Examples
 - B. Current Examples
 - C. Causes And Effects
- IV. What Are Some Indications Of Sexism In church?
 - A. Historical Examples
 - B. Current Examples
 - C. Causes And Effects
- V. What Can Be Done About Sexism?
 - A. Biblical Examples
 - B. Society's Examples
 - C. Preachers' Efforts
 - D. Christian Educators' Efforts
 - E. Self Help by the Oppressed
- VI. Conclusion

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SERMON ON THE ISSUE OF SEXISM

"LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN"
GENESIS 1:27; GALATIANS 3:28

Submitted To

Rev. Carolyn Knight

By

SHIRLEY REID

For

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"LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN"

Gen. 1:27; Gal. 3:28

Let us turn to our text in the Old Testament, Genesis 1:27, written by Moses under the inspiration of the Spirit of God to the people of Israel around 1450-1410 B.C., and in the New Testament, Galatians 3:28 which was written by Paul under inspiration of the Spirit of God about A.D. 49 from Antioch to the churches in Southern Galatia founded on Paul's first missionary journey. From the story of creation in Gen. culminating in the creation of humankind in the likeness of God to the affirmation of equality in Christ in what many call the "Christian Magna Charter"¹, the message of liberty and justice is proclaimed in the midst of patriarchal customs. Let us now listen to The Word of God from the NRSV

Gen. 1:27---"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

Gal. 3:28---"There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave or free, There is no male and female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." [The Word Of God for The People Of God]

OUR SUBJECT FOR TODAY IS: "LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN"

"One Nation, Under God, Indivisible with Liberty And Justice For All" reads one portion from The Pledge To The American Flag. But, is there really liberty and Justice for all? Does each person have a chance to climb the ladder of success or can some go just so far due to race, class, or gender? Is everyone afforded

opportunity to pursue God's Call on his or her life? While society asks, Can a woman run the nation or Can a woman go to war, the church asks can a woman be called to preach or can a woman pastor. Some in church and society fight against racism and classism, but uphold sexism. It is for this reason that I would like to invite you to focus your attention with me today on this third ism, sexism.

According to Webster,² "sexism is a prejudice or discrimination on the basis of sex, especially discrimination against women." Also, Phelps³ in "Joy Comes In The Morning" says, "when anyone believes that men are inherently superior to women or women or inherently superior to men, then he or she is guilty of the moral and social evil called sexism." Furthermore, an anonymous writer⁴ in "How to Quench The Spirit Without Really Trying" states, "a sexist society is one in which the net effect of social structure, procedures, decisions, habits, and acts is to prevent one sex from full development and to allow the other sex to maintain effective control."

However, this kind of thinking is contrary to the teachings and practices of God and Jesus Christ as shown in Gen. 1:27 and Gal. 3:28. Liberty and Justice, like judgment must begin in the House of The Lord. This message was given to the believers in Christ. Thus, we are to take the lead in seeing that liberty and justice exists for all God's children. Therefore, let us consider what God says through Gen. 1:27, Gal. 3:28, God's actions as recorded in God's Word and the example of Jesus and his followers; what has happened historically and presently in society and

church; and concret measures that we as followers of Christ can take to combat sexism and promote liberty and justice for all God's children.

First, contrary to the belief of some, liberty and justice for women began in the beginning as displayed in the creation narrative and proclaimed through God's actions and Jesus' actions, and examples of how God used women throughout the scriptures. Both male and female made in the image of God according to Gen. 1:27 were told in Gen. 1:28 to have dominion over the earth and every living thing that moves upon it. It does not say that mone is subordinate and the other greater. It does not say have dominion over each other. This beginning, God said was good.

However, sin caused humankind to move away from God's plan. The prophecy, which some quote in favor of subordination of women, would indeed come to pass. Men would indeed rule over their wives. However, a careful look at the display of god's intervention into the patriarchial culture of the Old Testament World shows a God who stills empowered women with leadership roles as well as men with leadership roles.

To the question, can women bring forth the word of God, God answers yes through Miriam⁵, Deborah⁶, and Huldah⁷. To those who ask can a woman run a nation or go to war, God answers through Deborah, yes. Deborah not only prophesied, but also ruled Israel as judge for forty years and was a successful warrior as well as a wife.⁸ Additionally, for six years, tradition tells us, Judah had a ruling queen named Atheliah.⁹ Also, God used Esther as well as Moses to deliver God's people.¹⁰ In answer to whether women can

participate in the rituals of the church, God allowed women to take part in the great choirs of the Temple according to passages from Psalms and the historical books in the Old Testament.¹¹ They were also part of the processionals. Women also took the vows of a Nazarite and assisted in offering the sacrifice as recorded in Numbers.¹² Furthermore, not only did God have theophanies with Abraham and Moses, but God also had theophanies with Hagar, Sarah, and Manoah's wife.¹³ God's prophesy through Joel was that God would pour out God's Spirit upon all flesh and sons and daughters would prophesy.¹⁴

Furthermore, Jesus, the One who came to set the captive free and to set at liberty those who were bruised,¹⁵ affirmed women in his ministry. Although Mary Magdalene and the group of women were not among the twelve, they followed Jesus even to the cross and the tomb.¹⁶ Can a woman tell the good news of Jesus' resurrection? To this Jesus says yes, because he chose a woman, Mary Magdalene to be the first to tell the good news. She was to go tell the brethren.¹⁷ Jesus healed both sons and daughters of Abraham when he healed the men and women Jews, and he healed both male and female Gentiles according to the records of the Gospels.

To the churches at Galatia, Paul was saying those in Christ are not to deny rights or oppress people on the basis of race, class, or gender. they were to practice impartiality shown by the one through whom they had received a new life through baptism according to Galatians 3:27.

Liberty and justice for all was to be the way of the Christian. Thus, the New Testament record records that women did have leader-

ship roles in the church. Priscilla taught with her husband Aquilla.¹⁸ Phoebe was a deacon.¹⁹ Chloe was over a house church.²⁰ Philip's daughters prophesied.²¹ Women were among the 120 in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit came.²²

Secondly, this liberty and justice displayed and proclaimed by God and Jesus has been denied and prohibited historically and currently by some in the church.

In society, early laws prohibited women from certain higher paying jobs, prohibited women from practicing law, and kept women economically oppressed. Additionally, a U.S. Government Booklet reveals that in 1992 women on the average made 71 cents for men's \$1.00.²³ Phelps reports that for black women, 60 cents was made for every \$1.00 made by white males of equal qualifications.²⁴ Additionally, a Government Study reports that women are being kept in low or mid-level job positions by what is called the "glass ceiling". Due to certain promotional practices, women can only advance just so far in a company, rarely moving to the inner circle.²⁵

In church, women are usually allowed to teach Sunday School, minister in children's church, fix communion if their husband is a deacon, preach and teach as a missionary in Africa, but not allowed to preach in the pulpit of the church that sent them. Sometimes, women are even licensed to preach, but often times, not ordained. Let them evangelize, but don't let them pastor.

Relying upon descriptive scriptures of what was culture of the first readers and traditions of church fathers and theologian with their beliefs of subordination of women, many ministers deny

women the opportunity to pursue their call. Women seminarians have been passed over in favor of men for positions. To many ministers, women are the backbone of the church. This according to Dr. Jacquelyn Grant is what is wrong. They want to keep women in the background.²⁶ They do not realize that sexism polarizes people and is dangerous to one's Spiritual health according to Wilma Heide.²⁷ It denies rights to those who are also made in the image of God, and it denies God's ability to pour out God's Spirit on all flesh. It denies liberty and justice for all God's children.

Thirdly, let us then, consider how we as followers of Christ can demonstrate and promote liberty and justice for all God's children so as to stand up against sexism as well as racism and classism. As Christians, we must believe that male and female both are created in the image of God and that those of us in the body of Christ must in our preaching and teaching mention feminine as well as masculine attributes of God.²⁸ We must also use and promote inclusive language. Our sermons and Bible studies must show women in a positive light so that women who are called to ministry know that others were called in the Bible. This will help to eliminate the saying that if God can use a donkey to speak, surely God can use a woman. Also, since male and female are made in the image of God, why not say, if God can call a man, surely God can call the other part of God's image--- female, as well.

Furthermore, seminaries must deal with the issue of sexism

For African American women, according to Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, racism , classism, sexism work togwther to oppress us.²⁹ Thus, it is very important for African American men to listen and to take seriously the stories of African American women.

Furthermore, seminaries must deal with the issue of sexism if future leaders are going to effect changes in their ministries. We must be clear ourselves on descriptive and normative scriptures. Then, we can go on to teach others about the differences.

Most vitally, the oppressed must boldly speak up for themselves. we cannot sit silently by and wait for someone to deliver us. we must promote liberty and justice as did Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Dr. Jacquelyn Grant. We must not wait for society to pass laws or to take the lead against sexism. We must be those shining lights for a dark world and that salt to add the seasoning of liberty and justice for all God's children.

In conclusion, if indeed we are going to follow Jesus, we must follow him all the way. Our liberator, who bled and died on Calvary for all and rose again showed us that sometimes we may have to go against tradition or what is popular in order to have God's ideal of liberty and justice for all God's children. I don't know about you today, but I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning Back. If no one joins me, still I will follow. No turning back. Sexism must not be. for there must be liberty and justice for all God's children. Praise Ye The Lord.

Notes

¹T.B. Maston "The Christian Magna Carta" in Treasures From Holy Scripture (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 97.

²Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1990).

³Jamie T. Phelps "Joy Came In The Morning" in A Troubling In My Soul. ed. by Emilie Towns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1963), 48.

⁴Church and Society, 1972. "How to Quench The Spirit Without Really Trying" (September/October).

⁵Exodus 15:20

⁶Judges 4:10

⁷2 Kings 22:14

⁸Judges 4:4

⁹Russell C. Prohl. Women In The Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1957), 65.

¹⁰Esther 4-9

¹¹Psalms 68:25; Ezra 2:65; Neh. 7:67; I Chron. 25:5-7; Ps. 46; I Chron. 15:20.

¹²Numbers 6:2, 13-21

¹³Gen. 16:7; 21:17; Gen 18:9; Judges 13:3-5, 9, 22.

¹⁴Joel 2:28

¹⁵Luke 4:18

¹⁶Luke 8:1-3

¹⁷John 20:17

¹⁸Romans 16:3

¹⁹Romans 16:1

²⁰I Cor. 1:11

²¹Acts 21:8, 9

²²Acts 1:13-14

²³Women's Changing Role. 1994. In The information Series On Current Topics. (Wylie Texas: Information Plus, 1994), 40.

²⁴Jamie T. Phelps, 52.

²⁵Women's Changing Roles, 33

²⁶Frances E. Wood. "Take my Yoke Upon You". In A Troubling In My Soul. ed. by Emilie M. Towns.(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993), 41-42.

²⁷Wilma Scott Heide. "Sexism is Dangerous To Your (Spiritual) Health. Church and Society. 63(september/October, 1972), 7

²⁸Ruth Matthews. "God, Women, and Men. The Baptist Quarterly XXXI (July, 1986),332.

²⁹Rufus Burrows, Jr. "Sexism In the Black Community and The Black Church.: Journal of The I.T.C. XIII Number 2(Spring, 1986).331.

"Sexism In Society And Church"

Social Issues Project

Submitted To

Rev. Carolyn Knight

By

SHIRLEY REID

For

CAM 850/02 Preaching as Social Commentary

Fall Semester, 1995

Interdenominational Theological Center

Atlanta, Georgia

"Sexism In Society And Church"
Social Issues Project By Shirley Reid
Submitted To Rev. Carolyn Knight
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Abstract

This paper will look at historical and current examples along with causes and effect, and possible means of eliminating sexism in society and church in the Black community and church as well as in the larger community and church. The basic premise is that any form of sexism is against the teachings of God as indicated in Genesis 1:27, Galatians 3:28, and the examples of Jesus Christ. However, many incidences of sexism still prevade the church as well as society. Therefore, it is encumbered upon the church as Christ's representative to take the lead in following Christ's examples by showing no partiality in its treatment of all of God's children.

Sexism In Society And Church

Introduction

This paper will look at historical and current examples along with causes and effects and possible means of eliminating sexism in society and church in the Black community and church as well in the larger community and religious arena.

The basic premise is that any form of sexism is against the teachings of God as indicated in Genesis 1:27 with both male and female being made in God's image; Galatians 3:28 with there being no distinction made between male and female in Christ; and the examples of Jesus Christ with his inclusiveness in his ministry. However, many incidents of sexism still prevade the church as well as society as this paper will reveal. Therefore, it is encumbered upon the church as Christ's representatives to take the lead in following Christ's examples by showing no partiality in its treatment of all of God's children.

This topic is of interest to me because of personal experiences as a female minister with sexism in the church. From watching four male ministers being given a trial sermon, which I was denied in a church where I have had membership since childhood, to being told by that pastor that he was not going to have 'that kind of thing' in his church(women preaching), I have seen up close the sin of sexism. Unfortunately, there seems to be a veil of silence unless one is directly affected. Furthermore,

in the church, there has been no effective way to deal with sexism on a level that matches the equal opportunity laws and grievance processes in the work force. In fact, leaders in church have used scriptures to justify sexism in much the same manner that slaveholding church goers did during slavery.

Thus, to this issue, I bring my own personal experiences, experiences of others, and my belief that sexism is on the same level with racism and classism. Over and against the laws and customs of the times, throughout biblical history, God gives examples of females in significant leadership roles.

Therefore, it is my contention that this issue should be addressed in sermons as against the teachings of God. we who love Jesus must follow him all the way. So, as seminarians, preachers, teachers, and counselors in training we must take a stand for justice and liberty for all God's children. we must be shining lights for a dark world as examples of God's inclusiveness for all humankind.

It is thereby hoped that this paper will not only add to my personal knowledge, but will alert others to the sin of sexism, the necessity of speaking out against it, and some methods of eliminating it where we can.

What Is Sexism?

According to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1990), "sexism" is a prejudice or discrimination based on sex: esp. discrimination against women." Additionally, sexism is "behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles

based on sex." In other words, sexism involves a preconceived judgment or opinion or difference made in treatment or favor on a basis other than individual merit.

Furthermore, the Government Pamphlet entitled, Women's Changing Role (1994, 158) views sexual harassment as one form of sexual discrimination. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission which is responsible for enforcing Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 (PL 88-352) forbidding sexual harassment further defines sexual harassment as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which become a condition of employment, the basis for employment decisions, or which creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment."

Moreover, Phelps (1993, 48) sees sexism as "a socially constructed evil involving patterns of relationships that are directed toward the denial of the human dignity and value of some human beings for the benefit of other human beings." Additionally, Phelps(1993, 39) states, "when anyone believes that men are inherently superior to women or women are inherently superior to men, then he or she is guilty of the moral and social evil called sexism."

Now that we have looked at what the word sexism taken alone means, let us look at what is meant by a "sexist society", According to the anonymous writer of "How To Quench the Spirit Without Really Trying" (1972), a sexist society is "one in which the net effect of social structures, procedures, decisions, hab-

its, and acts is to prevent one sex from full development and to allow the other sex to maintain effective control." Additionally, the same anonymous author defines sexism by corporate practices as 'institutional sexism'. "Whether by default or by aggressive pursuit, by conscious intent or by unconscious intent, by overt actions or by covert actions, sexism is an illness that distorts both those consolidating powerful identity and arrogating ministry to themselves, on such a basis, and those deprived of power, identity, and ministry, on such a basis."

Thus, from the above definitions, it is the contention of this writer that sexism is from the same prejudiced level of mentally as is racism and classism with their discriminating effects.

What Are Some Indications Of Sexism In Society?

Lest it appears that sexism is just a recent phenomenon, let us look at a few historical examples of sexism in society(non-church/biblical settings).

Prejudice and tradition were usually enough to limit job potentials for women. Additionally, laws such as the 1872 Bradwell vs. Illinois case which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld an Illinois law prohibiting a woman's admission to the bar to practice law. It stated, "The natural proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex limits it for many occupations of civil life. The constitution of the family organization, which if founded in the divine ordinance as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood."(Women's Changing Roles 1994, 41).

Likewise an 1874 law which was called a protective labor law and supported by labor leaders and feminists was really a sexist law because it prohibited women from certain jobs. For example, women were not to work at night, do excessive lifting, bartending, mining, smelting, setting pins in a bowling alley, handling freight, and undertaking any other job considered morally-corrupt (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 41).

Additionally, Bentall (1920, 285) tells of how The British North America Act of Canada in the 1920s provided for qualified persons to be summoned to the Senate. However, controversy arose as to whether women could be classified as persons. even the Prime Minister was "uncertain". Then in 1926 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that "persons" did not include women. However, Nellie McFung and four friends had this decision changed on appeal.

Very little has changed since 1900 in terms of sexism on the job inspite of the 200 plus percent of women in the work force. This can be seen in the disparity in the ratio of women's pay to men's pay. During the 1960s and 1970s, women made only 60 cents. (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 40).

Also, in 1982 when the Johnson controls, a maker of car batteries adopted a policy forbidding women, regardless of age (except for those who could provide medical proof of sterility from jobs in which they would come into contact with lead. Actually, it kept all women from earning the \$15 to \$20 an hour salary which represented the highest pay at that plant. Later, the Supreme Court ruled that this violated the Civil Rights Act. (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 42).

Let us take a look, now, at what is currently going on with sexism in society. This will include the span from 1985-1995.

In terms of salary, women on the average make lower than men. U.S. Documents (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 40) reports that in 1990, women made 72 percent of what men made. Additionally, in 1992, women earned an average of 71 cents for men's \$1.00. In terms of race, Phelps (1993, 52) quoting Amott and Matthaei in Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States, informs us that one-third of Black women are in low-paid, low-status jobs. Black women also earn 60 percent and Black men earn 73 percent of white men's medium income.

Furthermore, the 1992 case against State Farm brought out sexist conditions there. While women could only work as \$888.00 per year secretaries and office managers, the almost all (99.6 percent) male agents earned about \$61,000 in 1981. Using the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 814 women who had been denied sales agent jobs were awarded a \$157 million settlement. Additionally, one woman involved in the case went to work as an agent at another insurance company with a salary increase of over \$100,000. (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 42).

In addition to salary discrimination, there is what has been termed, the "glass ceiling". The Department of Labor, in A Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative 1991 as Reported In Women's Changing Roles (1994, 33) defines 'glass ceiling' as "artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organizations into management level positions." In other words, women and minorities

advance just so far in a company, but rarely make it to the inner circle of power where the important decisions are made. Furthermore, a government study by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs found that "not only are women and minorities often on the outside, the "glass ceiling" was found to be lower than originally expected, with these employees in lower mid-management positions(Women's Changing Roles 1994, 41).

Fortunately for women, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (PL 88-352) invalidated earlier restrictive laws which some companies recently tried to use(Women's Changing Roles 1994, 41).

Moreover, despite the fact that women make up two-thirds of the journalism students and that media is one of the most powerful ways of getting across social attitudes a recent study by Communications consortium (WDC) showed women in a minor role as subjects and decision makers concerning what would be in the media. Also, a 1989 study showed that just three percent of television presidents or vice presidents, six per cent of newspaper publishers, and eight per cent of radio presidents or vice presidents, and twenty-five per cent of mid-management workers are women. (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 48). Likewise, while women made up 94 per cent of the support and clerical staff, they wrote only thirty-three percent of the newspaper by lines. Additionally, a 1993 analysis of television newscasts revealed that women reported, on the average 14 per cent of the stories, ranging from 20 per cent on NBC to 9 per cent on ABC. (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 48).

Another subtle way of promoting and maintaining sexism in the job force is steering of women, who make up the majority in

vocational schools, into lower paying traditionally female occupations rather into higher-paying male-dominated jobs(Women's Role 1994, 47).

Furthermore, women and girls often have to deal with sexism in the home. This abuse is sometimes seen as "normative and what women and girls should expect as the result of being female". (Wood 1993, 40).

In terms of cause and effect, the personnel practices, wording of job descriptions and structure of the 'corporate ladder' tend to keep women from getting out of sex segregated jobs(Women's Changing Roles 1994, 42). Also, it is reported that the more blue-collar the job, generally the more open harassment (Women's Changing Roles 1994, 42).

According to Wood (1993, 39), backlash often occurs when the victimized group seeks to define itself on its own terms. Also, while "the dominate culture discriminate with such euphenisms as fetal protection or the mommy track, the Black culture often accuses the Black woman of being in academic company with white males or with discussion of Black men's definitions of 'real women.'" (Wood 1993, 39)

What Are Some Indications Of Sexism In The Church?

Let us first take a look at some historical indications of sexism in the church. There are several descriptive texts which depict the laws of the culture and traditions rather than normative, for every incident. Some of these descriptive texts are: Lev. 15: 19-30(menstrous women declared unclean); Lev. 12:2-5 (Mother of male infant unclean seven days and mother of a female infant unclean for fourteen days; Gen. 19:1-10 (Women as bribe in

the Sodom Story); I Kings 1:1-4(Bed-warmer for aged David); Proverbs 5:3-6;19:13;21:9,19(Belittling women). (Sawichi 1979, 46). Additionally, passages such as I Tim. 2:9-15 and I Cor. 12: 12-30 are thought by many to be pastoral norms meant to apply in specific situations (Sawichi 1979, 46). However, many people have used these scriptures to deny women rights in the church. These scriptures are not normative as Gen. 1:27, 2:21-23 and Gal. 3:23-28. Normative scriptures express theological statements rather than traditions or culture.

Several noted theologians and church fathers have been recorded voicing the sentiments of the church during the course of history. Bental (1990, 283) quoting Katherine Bushnell in God's Word To Women tells of the following first century rabbi sayings: "Each time a man prolongs conversation with a woman he causes evil to himself," and "Better that the words of the law should be burned than delivered to women." Additionally, De Galis in The Role of Women in the Church (Bental 1990, 283) tells of Tertullian's word to women: "Do you not know that you are an Eve? You are the devil's gateway...the first desserted of the divine law." Also, Sawicki (1979, 78-79) tells of how Aquinas taught that adultery was a worse sin for a woman than for a man because she violated property rights in making it possible for a 'bastard' to become her husband's heir. Even the Reformation with its doctrines of justification by faith and priesthood of 'all' believers did not offer women any better treatment. Quoting Bushnell again Bental (1990 , 284) tells of Luther's comments about women.

"Women were meant for bearing and raising children, and if a woman becomes weary and at last dead from bearing, that matters not, Let her only die from bearing, she is there to do it", says Luther. Additionally, Calvin believed that since women were created later than man, they were to be "a kind of appendage." He wrote, "Because all things are of God, let the woman be content in her subjection and not feel indignant because she has to play second fiddle to the superior sex" (Bentall 1990, 283).

In addition to this, a Scottish woman of high rank, Eufame MacLayne in 1591 was arrested and eventually burned at the stake for the crime of hiring a midwife to provide a painkiller during the delivery of twins. The people tried to connect her with witchcraft because they did not believe she relied on God's grace.

Furthermore, fourteenth century Catherine of Sierrs was subject to continual persecutions from friars and sisters. The following section of her diary was quoted by Pohl(1957, 77). "How shall it be done with me as Thou has said?... For my sex is an obstacle as Thou knowest, Lord...because it is contemptible in men's eyes..." "But the Lord answered," 'I pour out the favor of My Spirit on whom I will. All are equal before Me...Therefore, My daughter it be My will that thou appear before the public'.

Yet another woman who suffered from sexism about a century ago was Florence Nightingale. She wrote to Author Stanley , Dean of Westminster, "I would have given her[the church], my head, my hand, my heart. She would not have them. She told me to go back and do crochet in my mother's drawing room"(Pohl 1957, 77).

Also, Bental(1990, 290) tells of how in 1845, single women who asked to be missionaries were refused and told that "if God wanted them on the mission field, he would send them husbands."

Furthermore, sexism is not a new phenomenon in the Black community either. Burrow (1986, 318) relates the experiences of The Reverend Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Watkins Harper. Jarena Lee was denied ordination having been told by Richard Allen that "their Discipline knew nothing about women being ordained to preach". When a white man claimed that women should not have equal rights with men because Jesus was not a woman, Sojourner Truth stiffed his voice when she said. "Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him." Frances Ellen Harper, however, viewed sexism as a lesser problem than racism. (Burrows(1986). Additionally, Nannie Helen Burrough in 1900 dealt with sexism as she addressed The National Baptist Convention with her paper, "How The Women Are Hindered"(Higginbotham 1993, 150).

This brings us to some current examples of sexism in the church and religious community.

Miller (1991, 99-100) tells of how she could not get her 6 year old son and her 4 year old daughter to budge from the acceptance of the idea received from church, that God is male. Nor could she move them from the idea that the brother is God-like while the sister is not. "Mommy, I'm not like God! I'm a girl."

Still, Wood(1993, 41) tells of how churches continue to thwart women's calls to pastor and preach with the excuse that "our church is not ready for a woman". Jokes from the pulpit

consistently receive laughter and go unchallenged. Some church organizations even prefer slow deterioration under poor male leadership over any female leadership.

Additionally, Wood(1993, 41-41) tells of the "pillar and scapegoat syndrome". Black women are at the same time place on pedestals and denounced as the root cause of the demise of the Black community.

Yet another situation involving women in the church is the identity of the woman as the "backbone" of the church. Wood(1993, 41-42) quotes Jacquelyn Grant as saying "the telling portion of the word 'backbone' is 'back'. "It has become apparent that most of the ministers who use this term are referring to location rather than function." "They really mean that women are in the background and should be kept there"

An example of individual sexism is the unwillingness of a fieldwork placement officer in a theological seminary to initiate any action with the local church for placement of women in areas other than Christian education. ("How To Quench The Spirit Without Really Trying").

An example of institutional sexism is the refusal of a Christian education committee delegation of three men from a local presbytery to interview any of three female ministry candidates who had signed for interviews for a summer youth study project director. ("How To Quench The Spirit Without Really Trying")

Rayburn (1981, 63) tells of some reflections of a female

seminarian in Woman Whither Goest Thou. In a theology class of 20 men and 2 women, the professor would address the class as "brethren," "men," and "fellows". Additionally, female seminarians are often asked by their male counterparts, "What are you going to do when you finish ministry?"

Furthermore, Cynthia V. Vaughan (1995, 247), a seminary student at I.T.C. tells of being turned down for a student minister position at her church. Later, she found that the reason she was turned down was that "they wanted a man for the position."

As with society, the church arena involving sexism also seems to stem from desire for power, control, and a fear of loss of position to a woman. Additionally, descriptive scriptures are often used out of context. I have not found the scripture that says of women, "I forbid them not to preach."

There are several other excuses for sexist behavior toward women preachers. For example, the reason why the pastor of my home church said he would not license me was "there were not any women among the twelve disciples". [Were there any Blacks?, I asked.] I was also told, "It is against the Baptist Doctrine." However, I find it amazing that I did not find this doctrinal statement anywhere in writing when I studied Baptist Polity. Also, I was told that my family may not support my ministry. However, they are my biggest supporters.

Additionally, some of the rejection and discrimination against women comes from a lack of being informed. Many times people are carrying out what they have learned by example or training.

Moreover, Heide(1972, 7) contends that "sexism is dangerous to one's Spiritual health." also, "stereotyping people by sex, race, nationality, or religion is to polarize people."

Also, Wood(1993, 38), "the dominance and submission mode of gender relations within the Black christian community, as well as in the dominant culture meets criteria for moral evil and creates negative concepts of men and women sharing God's call to Christian life and witness."

What Can Be Done About The Issue Of Sexism?

In society, laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 should be continually reinforced and enacted where needed. Also, as is being done, studies of certain policies help to uncover hidden sexist agendas.

In the church arena, there are several things that church leaders can do to combat sexism. First, we can recognize and respect the dignity and sanctity of all persons, regardless of race, class, or sex, for we are all made in the image of God. Secondly, we can use inclusive language in speech, correspondence, and literature and encourage others to do so. (Moore 1989). Thirdly, in our sermons and Bible lessons, we can give attention to the feminine aspects as well as masculine aspects of God (Matthews 1986) also, we should share stories of positive Bible women. Let others know the stories of the called women of the Bible so that those today can identify. Fourthly, "leaders should recognize the full redemption of women as well as of men and refrain from using Genesis 3 as a way of binding and oppressing the women,"

according to Bental 1990, 286). Fifthly, we must avoid literalizing.

In specific, African Americans should not that for the African American woman racism, classism, and sexism work together. Elimination of one must be accompanied with elimination of the other, as suggested by Jacquelyn Grant (Burrows 1986, 331). Also, according to Burrows (1986, 329), sexism is not a Black female problem since the female did not create sexism. He contends that it is a Black male problem. Black males need to listen to and take seriously the Black female's story.

Additionally, I believe that affirmative, intentional steps to expose the evil of sexism should be taken by all and especially by seminaries which are responsible for preparing those who can use their leadership roles to make changes. Hence, as Christian leaders, we must take the lead in the community, work force, home, and church to eliminate sexism, thus being the salt and light for the world.

Most importantly, the oppressed must help themselves. We cannot participate as a silent partner to sexism. Rather we must expose sexism and take a stand by speaking out, as did Burroughs (Higginbotham 1993, 150). Additionally, we cannot wait for others to deliver us or to find a way. Sometimes, we must make our own way and step out on faith as founders of churches as did Rev. Carolyn Knight (Goldman 190, 1,4). Finally, as women, we must listen to the stories of our sisters and affirm each other.

Conclusion

Armed with such information, the Christian leader must accept the challenges in What Can Be Done and move forward to first stamp out the sin of sexism in our churches, theological institutions, and ministries. then, we can move on to eliminate sexism in society. It is my belief that God's house will be judged as to whether or not we treat everybody with justice, equality, and liberation. In some cases, we may even have to make personal adjustments in our own attitudes and behavior. We must make inclusiveness a reality rather than a byword. Finally, we who love Jesus are called to follow Jesus all the way. When we do this, there will be no racism, there will be no classism emanating from the house of God. Neither will sexism be found in God's house. For "in Christ, there is no Jew nor Greek, bond or free, there is no male and female. All is one."

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**GANGSTER RAP
(Values with No Anchor)**

**Submitted to
Rev. Carolyn A. Knight
by
Jesse Watkins**

**for
Preaching As Social Commentary
CAM 850/02**

**Interdenominational Theological Center
Atlanta, Georgia
December 15, 1995**

**Pericope
St. Matthew 7:15-17**

One of the major themes in the Old Testament narratives is the interrelatedness of Creation. Human beings are not self-sufficient. We are created for relationship to God, to others, and to nature. Only in this way can we experience God's intended wholeness (Shalom). Each part of God's creation finds its fulfillment in interrelatedness with all. If some are denied wholeness, we all are diminished.

Opposed to this concept of creation as relational is a common and dangerous distortion of the biblical understanding of creation. It is the distortion of hierarchical thinking about creation. Over the centuries, in the church, the misuse of God's commission giving humanity dominion over the earth led to a hierarchical understanding that divided the relationship of the human to God and to nature. Hierarchical understanding operates something like this picture, a ladder of categories. At the top is God, whose nature is pure spirit. At the bottom is the earth whose nature is material. Already you have a polarity between the spiritual and the material, the divine and the bodily. Ranged in between are the other "orders" of creation: humans, animals, plants. The closer you get up the ladder to God, the higher is the moral worth attributed to that order of creation. Thus, the earth itself is far from God and of little worth. This is hardly in keeping with the pronouncement of God that the creation was all very good.

Early in the history of the Christian Church, a subdivided hierarchy became the standard: God, males, females, other races than white, Jews, animals, plants, and the earth itself. This hierarchical understanding of creation became the foundation for entire superstructures of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. It was the custom in the medieval law codes to list the killing of a Jew in the same section and the same penalty as poaching the King's deer. Jews were thought

guilty of deicide and therefore worth little more than animals. We all know that women and members of the nonwhite races have been slandered in the history of the church by defining their nature closer to the bodily and animal orders of creation, and therefore farther from God's spirit. They were said to occupy lower orders of creation, and this understanding, in turn, was used to justify slavery and the denial of ordination to women as well as a host of other racist and sexist actions. It has been suggested that in our century the poor have been added to the hierarchical list among those who are farther from God, while those who have been blessed with prosperity elevate themselves on the ladder to a position of greater closeness to God.

Clarice Martin, in her article, "The Haustafeln in African-American Biblical Interpretation," shows the correlation between passages such as Colossians 3:18 - 4:1 which show the relationship of three subordinate groups to the one dominant figure of the household, or where the essential concern of the passages is the relationship of the "weaker" or "inferior" groups to the dominant male-master figure with that of social structure of the Greco-Roman household (Ephesians 5:21 - 6:9 and 1 Peter 2:18 - 3:7).

"During this time the structure of superior and inferior roles was believed to be basic to the well-being of the whole society."¹ It was generally accepted that wives, children and slaves should submit fully to the rule of the husband-father-master and practice his religion. The household was believed to be an economically independent, self-sufficient unit that was the basis of the state. Several households constituted a village, and several villages a city-state.²

Hellenistic Jews, including Philo and Josephus, also sought to articulate ethical imperatives in the pattern of household codes. "The view that Hellenistic Judaism borrowed its scheme of ethical instruction is well-attested. The Hellenistic Jewish scheme emphasized

worship and obedience to the one God and duties relating to husbands and wives in marriage, children, masters and slaves, and the young and old."³

William A. Herzog argues that "the early Christian community as a 'minority community' in a 'majority culture' drew upon the resources, precedents, models and paradigms of the society of which it was a part as it reassessed the meaning of life in the ekklesia of God."⁴

Gerd Theissen has argued that the "agape love of Christianity reduced the frictions in status inequality and structural hierarchies as they existed in the patriarchal society. Male dominance and female, child and slave subordination were accepted and maintained as normative, but with the understanding that there was slow and inner equality in Christ."⁵ Other scholars argue that the New Testament writers used the House Codes as a form of apologia for the Christian faith. This is particularly true of 1 Peter 1:11 - 3:12 where the *Sitz im Leben* is one of the high socio-political tensions between the Christians and the surrounding pagan world. "The household codes function in this context to reinforce and secure 'proper household management,' and conformity to generally accepted societal norms."⁶

Regardless as to which of these arguments comes closer to the truth, these passages later became the southern churchperson's major argument in defense of human bondage. The supposition of the pro-slavery argument based on Leviticus 25 could be aptly summarized: "If God gave the Hebrews written permission to buy, hold, and sell men and women in perpetual servitude, why should we not do so as well?"

Even though the Bible has been considered by many to be the major vehicle for subjugating Blacks, this racism, stereotyping, and romantic mythology of the antebellum plantation was well established in America's literature.

Joel Chandler Harris entertained the nation in the late nineteenth century with stories built around the character he created, the docile, contented slave Uncle Remus, later celebrated on the screen in Walt Disney's *Song of the South* (1946). In his popular novel, Thomas Nelson Page depicted free blacks after Emancipation as wretched in comparison to the black servants of the 'good old days' of slavery.⁷

"Added to these anti-black literary confabulations was the widespread slander of African Americans in the media and popular culture. Northern newspapers and mass media justified southern oppression of African Americans, approved of lynching, and regularly printed racist caricatures of blacks in editorial cartoons, advertisement and postcards."⁸ Reflecting on the poisoned racist condition of the popular imagination at the end of the nineteenth century, the historian Mary Berry pointedly concluded that "with the possible exception of the Chinese no other ethnic group was more frequently lampooned than blacks were between 1895 and 1900."⁹

But it is with the novels of Thomas Dixon that the images of African Americans as infantile, lazy, and subservient are supplemented with the radically newer images of blacks as vicious beasts and rapists. The literary critic Addison Gayle attributes the emergence of this new stereotype in the media and popular culture of blacks as vicious criminals to the need of both southern and northern whites to suppress the expansion of black civil rights and political power developed during the progressive interval of Reconstruction (1867-1877).¹⁰

The historical Joel Williamson notes that "Thomas Dixon's novels and lectures translated this political, psychological background, as well as his own racial pathology, into a fanatical campaign to save white womanhood by punishing the black incipient rapist."¹¹ Thus, a combination of political, psychic, and material motives shaped the new stereotype deployed by the Klan's racist thugs to justify their terror, murder, and repression against black people in the south and unite white supremacists.

It was the combined work and ideas of these racist novels, literature and historical commentary that help form the plot for the nation's first film opening on February 8, 1915 in Los Angeles. D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was Hollywood's first-length studio

production. Because of its anti-black depictions and systematic, overt racism, it remains the most controversial film ever made in America.

The Hollywood plantation genre, spanning approximately sixty years and depicting slaves and slavery in three broad phases of meaning and development has played a significant role in shaping the audience's conceptions of race and its mediation of the audience's racial and social attitudes. The opening phase starts with the original hegemonic impulse of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and extends through the depression thirties to the classic cinema high moments of *Jezebel* (1938) and *Gone With the Wind* (1939). Then the future of the cinematic slave began to shift. During and after World War II, Hollywood's plantation mythology underwent a period of significant revision that softened some of the genre's supremacist assumptions about slavery, as exemplified by such films as *Band of Angels* (1957).

Finally, recognizing the post-War pressures of an intensifying black political struggle for human rights, by the late 1960s a sharp reversal of perspective in the plantation genre was expressed in such films as *Mandingo* (1975) and *Drum* (1976) to the recovery and updating of older filmic devaluations of African Americans, as exemplified in the *Rocky Cycle* (1976-82) or the *Blues Brothers* (1980).

The ideology of racial domination and difference can never be permanently fixed in place as a complete of static "thing." Instead, it is a dynamic, shifting relation defined and conditioned by social struggle. Societies' unceasing efforts to frame blackness are constantly challenged by the cultural and political self-definitions of African Americans, who as a people have been determined since the inception of this hierarchical system to militate against it. This reality can readily be seen as far back as the mid-nineteenth century when a young Presbyterian

clergyman named Charles Colcock Jones preached the New Testament narratives enjoining submission of slaves to their masters. His narration of the response of the slaves is recorded in his Tenth Annual Report written in 1845 which read:

Allow me to relate a fact which occurred in the spring of this year, illustrative of the character and knowledge of the Negroes at this time. I was preaching to a large congregation on the Epistle to Philemon; and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants, and upon the authority of Paul, condemned the practice of running away, one-half of my audience deliberately walked off with themselves, and those that remained looked anything but satisfied. After dismissal, there was no small stir among them: some solemnly declared 'that this was no such epistle in the Bible.' Others, 'that it was not the gospel'; others, 'that I preached to please masters'; others, 'that they did not care if they ever heard me preach again.'¹²

Although the legal struggle put up by the NAACP, black intellectuals and concerned whites failed to stop *The Birth of a Nation's* general circulation and popularity, the unrelenting protest surrounding the film did have positive, dialectical returns. Because of the controversy activated by black protest, 558 feet of scenes showing black soldiers attacking white women, a Lincoln letter saying that he did not believe in the equality of races, and a scene posing the deportation of blacks back to Africa as a solution to America's race problem were cut from the work print.

From the late 1940s through the 1960s, with a strategy of mass protest that later exploded into open rebellion, blacks affected changes in all areas of American society. "Black political activity achieved an unprecedented national prominence, starting with the Congress of Racial Equality's (CORE's) first freedom rides in 1947 and continued with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956, the March on Washington in 1963, the Watts rebellion in 1965 and the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which left 160 U.S. cities burning."¹³

From 1965 on, African Americans found their sharpened perspectives on American racism and their political expectations more relevantly addressed by a resurgence of black nationalism, the conceptualization and articulation of Black power, the founding of the Black Panther Party, and a range of organizations, specifically devoted to the goal of "black liberation" in America.

Conversely, from the mid-1980s onward, we have witnessed the rise of an insidious socially fragmenting violence driven by the availability of cheap guns and crack cocaine in the nation's partitioned inner cities. Unlike the black rage from 1965 on, black rage during this era has lost its political focus in this violent apartheid environment. It has become an internalized form of self-destruction expressed as gang and drug warfare. If such a situation can be said to have positive effects, we can see this rage as an energizing element in much of the new black cultural production, finding expression in a rearticulated criticism of white racism and a resurgent interest in black nationalism among the urban youth inspired by rap lyrics.

The Rap Culture

Rap expresses the ongoing preoccupation with literacy and orality that has characterized African-American communities since the inception of legally coerced illiteracy during slavery. Rap artists explore grammatical creativity, verbal wizardry, and linguistic innovation in refining the art of oral communication. The rap artist, as Cornel West has indicated,

is a bridge figure who combines the two potent traditions in black culture: preaching and music. The rap artist appeals to the rhetorical practice eloquently honed in African-American religious experiences and the cultural potency of black singing/musical traditions to produce an engaging hybrid. They are truly urban griots dispensing social and cultural critique, verbal shamans exorcising the demons of cultural amnesia.¹⁴

At its best moment, rap culture provides many youth a means of escape from the material seductions of the drug culture, while permitting others to express incisive social criticism about a range of issues such as racism, classism and an empty sense of cultural pride or historical achievement. At its worse moment, rap culture represents the black ghetto poor, the so-called under-class whose dominant desire is to escape economic and material deprivation and to color the American Dream black and green. One way of achieving the dream is through criminal activity ranging from petty robbery, fencing stolen goods, and armed burglary to the now sprawling multinational entrepreneurial operations associated with drugs. The drug culture has generated its own illegitimate, underground political economy that is buttressed by the manufacturing, production, packaging and distribution of mostly "crack" cocaine. A recent alternative to drugs as a means of escape from economic hardship is rap music. And as the old folk used to say, "you are what you eat." Most rappers coming out of this environment live what they rap about. Rap videos, like so many other visual vehicles of American popular fantasy, are generously embellished by the icons of material excess, including high priced automobiles, expensive designer or casual wear, and great amounts of ostentatious jewelry. "The unquestioning pursuit of material wealth is reflected in the metaphors of abundant living that dominate the lexicon of rap culture: getting paid, living large, collecting dividends."¹⁵

Rap culture, too, is obsessed with the ornamental and orgastic elements of sexual fulfillment. Rap lyrics and videos are permeated by the emblems of sexual addiction, and personal freedom often is envisioned through tropes of sexual release. Moreover, sexual domination and verbal abuse are often viewed as marks of manhood. Despite the increasing visibility of women rappers, rap culture remains, 'a man's world.' Such machoism invariably portrays the exclusive function of female sexuality as the satisfaction of male desire magnifying the sexist practices, misogynist belief, and patriarchal ideas that are enforced and sustained in complex and subtle ways across our society.¹⁶

"In a study conducted in 1992 by the research group, MEE, it was discovered that youth are not listening in adequate numbers to parents, teachers, ministers and positive role models, but are listening to the peer group, rappers and commercials."¹⁷

Michael Dyson (the author of *Reflecting Black*) when asked his thoughts about the struggles churches face in being relevant for, and in holding the interest and commitment of youth:

Do you consider 'secular spirituality' as exhibited in pop musicians like Michael Jackson and M. C. Hammer to be the predominant form of religious experience for today's young people? Is music, as the cliché goes, a new religion? Answer: Well, it's a subgenre, I would say. It wouldn't be a religion of its own in one sense, but it's certainly a primary means by which these young people are experiencing religious reality and receiving a religious message.¹⁸

Dyson goes on to say that because of the decline in church attendance rap musicians have become priests of a culture that has fixated itself on the oral dimension of popular culture, "and yes, young people are flocking to them and viewing them and giving to them a sense of authority and authenticity that heretofore had been associated with the church."¹⁹

Rap artists, in one sense, occupy the same position as the NAACP, CORE, and many other transformers of our broken society. But in another sense, they stand as perpetrators of an evil that permeates the very fabric of society, while young people are flocking to them and giving them authority and authenticity. This group chose to be in opposition to the norms and values of their African-American heritage, promoting disregard for personal safety, substance abuse, promiscuity, and academic failure as a condition for acceptance.

As rap artists invent a musical genre that measures the pulse of black youth culture, they are also inventing themselves. From the ready resources of culture, history, tradition, and community, rap artists fashion musical personae who literally voice their hopes, fears, and

fantasies: the self as cultural griot, feminist, educator, or itinerant prophet of black nationalism; but also, the self as inveterate consumer, misogynist, violent criminal, or sexual athlete. It is this ever-expanding repertoire of created selves that invites us to interrogate the values and visions of rap culture. The major theme of Romans 1:18-32 is what can be known apart from God's revelation to Israel and in Christ? These young rappers like the ungodly of old have become futile in their thinking. Claiming to be wise they have become fools. All we need to know about God and God's creation is clearly seen, being understood by the things that God has made. Values require foundation, values have to be internalized and be a part of a larger ideology, a larger belief system higher than self. I believe the best place to anchor your values is in Christ.

As one enters and is nurtured by the Christian community, they form values, perspectives, and perceptions that inform their deciding and acting. Social concern requires not only that we ask what we should do in a broken world but also that we ask who we are to be. The shaping of the decision maker is as important as the shaping of the decision. In the shaping of our Christian being or identity, the Bible plays a central role. We encounter its witness in the preaching, teaching and liturgy of the church, and we are shaped by it. It is for this reason that those who are committed to the task of Christian social witness as a natural outgrowth of Christian faith must seek the broadest possible understanding of the biblical inheritance that is ours. If we were to develop a sound understanding of our biblical material, we would better understand ourselves. By coming to grips with "the Sovereign yet related Creator found in the two creation accounts that open the book of Genesis, we get a picture of a God whose power is expressed in vulnerability to the world's suffering, whose mysterious otherness came close

to us in intimate relationship. For those who know such a God, the exercise of power must always be tempered by a caring relationship."²⁰ One of the most important themes in the biblical material appears in Genesis 1:26-27 with the statement that "humanity is created in the image of God, it is not just a gift, it is also a responsibility to be created in the image of God" brings with it the commission to care for the earth, which follows in Genesis 1:28-30. "It was the practice of ancient kings to erect images of themselves to represent their sovereignty in the far-flung corners of their empires. The biblical writer has transferred this metaphor to the divine realm. In Genesis 1, God, who is truly sovereign over all creation, has chosen to place the divine image into human beings as the representatives or trustees of God."²¹ Thus, to have the gift of God's image is to have also the responsibility to show that image forth in relation to the whole of creation.

Another important theme in this material is the affirmation of the goodness of creation. At the end of the sixth day, God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good (1:31). In biblical times this was a remarkable statement. "Ancient cultures spoke of divine powers inhabiting all the realms of nature, hence one often stood in fear and apprehension of the world and needed magic or incantations to protect oneself and appease the gods."²²

In contrast, the Hebrews express the assurance that God's sovereign power has been used to create a world that is benevolent and trustworthy. Further, it is clear that God's intention is that the goodness of creation be experienced by all its parts, all persons and all nature. It was not to be good for some and bad for others and that's the breaks. Those who know the vision of God's good creation, therefore, cannot settle for a world where the desire of some for an excess of creation's good gifts begin to deny enough for others.

Along with the other gifts of creation already discussed came the gift of human freedom. The man and the woman are given the capacity to make choices for themselves, and the choices are for either obedience or disobedience. What unfolds in the story of Genesis 3 is a drama that speaks to all of human existence concerning the meaning of our choices, the nature of sin and the consequences of broken creation. The aspect of sin highlighted in this story is the sin of overreach, attempting to go beyond the limits of our humanness to try for the prerogatives of God. Some theologians refer to this as the sin of pride. Pride is involved, but sin here is more than the attitude we associate with the word pride. It is the attempt to take destiny into one's own control as if we had no limits we must acknowledge.

ENDNOTES

¹Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 208.

²*Ibid.*, 209.

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*, 210.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*, 211.

⁷Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African-American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 11.

⁸*Ibid.*, 12.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod*, 216.

¹³Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 29.

¹⁴Michael E. Dyson, *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 12.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 278.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁷Jawanza Kunjufu, *Hip-Hop vs. MAAT: A Psycho/Social Analysis of Values* (Chicago: African-American Images, 1993), 81.

¹⁸Dyson, *Reflecting Black*, 20.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 21.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Ibid., 23.

²²Ibid.

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Manuscript

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Dr. Carolyn A. Knight

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for

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December 15, 1995

Matthew 7:15-17

Because of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruit. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

NEW JACK AND HIP HOP
(Values With No Anchor)

The word prophet originally meant to predict or foretell future events; messengers of God; and as they commonly connected with such predictions, instructions and exhortations in regards to the sins dangers and duties of mankind the word came to denote any who warned or threatened, or in any way communicated the will of God.

A true prophet is God's mouthpiece. This individual conveys God's message to his people. For the present we may conceive of the false prophet as being self-appointed and as being a person who though pretending to claim truth, actually proclaims their own lie.

The characterization of the false prophet as the one who lacks divine authorization and brings their own message, generally telling the people what they like to hear, is rooted in the old testament. Isaiah 30:9-10 as it speaks concerning the children of Israel, said that they were a rebellious people, faithless children, children who would not hear the instruction of the Lord, who say to the seers "Do not see" and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy" to us what is right, speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions.

When we examine the various facets of the rap culture as it exists today, we find striking similarities to this old testament environment. The rap culture with some of its

components being that of Hip-Hop and New Jack City has been labeled as a youth oppositional subculture who rejects the norms and values of the mainstream, like the messengers of old who instructed and exhorted in regards to the dangers and duties of men.

This culture has griots who are responsible for giving it's listeners "the Flava" short for flavor of the "month". This implies that trends or values are cycled monthly. The street life of a message refers to the time it has in value or is viewed as part of the culture. But in fairness to all rappers I think its only fitting that we identify two polar extremes.

On the one hand the rap culture represents the voice and vision of a significant segment of black youth who has used the art as a means of escape from the material seductions of the drug culture; while permitting others to express incisive social criticism about a range of issues such as racism, classism, and an empty sense of cultural pride or historical achievement.

Over-against those in whom Jaulanza Kun-Ju-Fu in his book Hip-Hop vs maat say fall within the innovative and rebellious status of social adjustment.

The innovative model represent those persons who have accepted the goals and values of the society, but have not been given the legal means to secure those goals. Therefore, a person who values owning a mercedes or BMW, but reads below the sixth grade level may resort to other ways to secure that level of income be it drugs, crime, sports, music or the lottery.

In the rebellious status the individuals not only doesn't accept the values of society, they also do not believe they have to accept 12 to 16 years of mis-education and work 40

hours a week to maintain someone else's desire for success.

Most rappers coming out of this environment live what they rap about. Rap videos, like so many other visual vehicles of American popular fantasy are generously embellished by the icons of material excess, including high priced automobiles, expensive designer or casual wear and great amounts of ostentatious jewelry.

The unquestioning pursuit of material wealth is reflected in the metaphors of abundant living that dominate the lexicon of rap culture getting paid, living large and collecting dividends. But for Charity's sake, we must not make ourselves judges by any assumed superiority of our own knowledge or wisdom -- less we assume the authority of the only omniscient, unerring Judge, or performs the angels' work prematurely. But I heard Jesus say by their fruit ye shall know them.

In a study designed to test whether heavy metal and rap listeners would be in more adolescent turmoil than would non-heavy metal and non-rap listeners (Adolescent turmoil being defined to include a history of more peer, school, substance abuse, sexual activity, psychiatric problems and less traditional religious affiliation), the results found that the current grades below average 46% for HM/R over against 24% other -- those suspended or expelled from junior or high school 44% HM/R, 23% other; illicit drug use 23% HM/R, 8% other; sexually active 40% HM/R, 18% other and counseling for drugs and alcohol 38% HM/R, 15% other.

The study recognize that other factors such as disturbed family history or difficulties in other areas may have to do with demographics. And as I make my indictment against

a certain section of the rap culture, I am cognizant of the fact that rap music can't and shouldn't be made to take responsibility for all that is wrong in our society today.

For as far back as the beginning of our human race, the misuse of God's commission giving humanity dominion over the earth led to a hierarchical understanding that divided the relationship of mankind to God and to nature. Early in the history of the Christian church a subdivided hierarchy became the standard. God, males, females other races than white, Jesus, animals, plants and the earth itself.

Even though the Bible has been considered by many to be the major vehicle for subjugating blacks, this racism stereotyping and romantic mythology of the antebellum plantation South were well established in America's literature. "Joel Chandler Harris entertained the nation in the late nineteenth century with stories built around the Docile, contented slave character he created by the name of Uncle Remus.

Thomas Page in his novel depicted free blacks after emancipation as wretched in compassion to the black servants of the good old days of slavery. At the end of the nineteenth century, the historian Mary Berry pointedly concluded that "with the possible exception of the Chinese, no other ethnic group was more frequently lampooned than the blacks were between 1895 and 1900.

It was the combined work and ideas of these racist novels, literature and historical commentary that help form the plot for the nation's first film D.W. Griffiths "The Birth of A Nation". Because of its antiblack depictions and systematic overt racism, it remains the most controversial film ever made in America.

From the late 1940's through the 1960's with a strategy of mass protest that later exploded into open rebellion, blacks affected changes in all areas of American society. Black political activity achieved an unprecedented national prominence. Starting with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) first freedom riders in 1947 and continuing with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956, the march on Washington in 1963, the Watts rebellion in 1965 and the 1968 assassination of Dr. King which left 160 U.S. cities burning. From 1965 on, African Americans found their sharpened perspective on American racism and their political expectations more relevantly addressed by a resurgence of black nationalism.

Conversely from the mid 1980's onward, we have witnessed the rise of an insidious socially fragmenting violence driven by the availability of cheap guns and crack cocaine in the nations partitioned inner cities. Unlike the black rage from 1965 on, black rage during this era has lost its political focus in this violent apartheid environment; it has become an internalized form of self-destruction expressed as gang and drug warfare.

If such a situation can be said to have positive affects, we can see this rage as an energizing element in much of the new black cultural production finding expression in a re-articulated criticism of white racism and a resurgent interest in black nationalism among the urban youth inspired by rap lyrics.

Unfortunately, the negative implications of rap music have become as popular as the music itself. It has attacked racism through more racism, lack of power through supremacy. Many teenagers and minority group members view rappers as their spokesperson because of their ability to speak in street language and bluntly express their

frustrations. That street language usually depicts the least socially desirable elements of urban life including misogyny, illegal drugs, and violence

Gender equality is hindered by a sexist society and rappers contribute to this abuse. Often these artists refer to their partners as B's and W's. Dr. Dre's most popular song "Nuthin' but a 'G' Thang" is a misogynistic anthem. Snoop Doggy Dogg raps the first few verses of the song ... before you hit on a "B" you have to find a contraceptive, You never know she could be learning her man and at the same time burning her man/ ...

In addition to misogynist feelings and attitudes expressed in rap music, drugs also seem to be a major theme, where the artist praises its illegal consumption and make public its effects. Recently Latino rap newcomer Cypress Hill became the official spokesman for the reform of marijuana.

Michael Dyson, the author of *Reflecting Black*, when asked whether rap music had become a new religion responded by saying that its not a religion of its own in one sense, but it's certainly a primary means by which these young people are experiencing religious reality and receiving a religious message. Dyson goes on to say that because of the decline in church attendance rap musicians have become priest of a culture. And yes, young people are flocking to them, and viewing them, and giving them a sense of authority and authenticity that heretofore had been associated with the church. Blind leading the blind.

As rap artists invent a musical genre that measures the pulse of black youth culture they are also inventing themselves. The self as cultural griot, feminist, educator, or itinerant prophet of black nationalism but also the self as inveterate consumer, misogynist,

violent criminal, or sexual athlete. It is this ever expanding repertoire of created selves that invites us to interrogate the values and vision of rap culture.

Values require foundation, values have to be internalized and be a part of a larger ideology, a larger belief system higher than self. Rap artists must realize that God had a set agenda long before God formed them in their mother's womb. And "being" simply mean that they become a part of God's set agenda, God introducing into their psyche the kind of world God intend for it to be - the Godly order - the Godly Justice and the Godly community. It means to be distinctive - thinking on all that is good, honest, just and pure what so ever is of virtue and praise to God.

Social concern requires not only that we ask who we should be in a broken world, but also that we ask what we should do. Ephesians 2:10 says that we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus into good works. Doing means that we will be radically committed to doing justice, condemning oppression and working toward the good stewardship of this world so all may enjoy what God has provided.

Then finally, being and doing provides the context and validation for the final phase which is the saying. It is very definitely stated in scripture that god put into the mouths of certain men the very words they should speak. He told Moses to go, and I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say. We need God's word and not our own words. For it is only through God's words that human kind can be regenerated. James 1:18 says God begot us by the word of truth. Peter said that we were born not of corruptible seed but incorruptible seed which is the word of God. Not only do the word regenerate but it cleans. In John 15:3 Jesus said "Now are you clean through the word

which I have spoken to you." His words are living and powerful, sharper than a two edged sword piercing to the division of soul and spirit.

And as involved participants, stewards of the mysteries of God, ambassadors of Christ, heralds of the eternal, we must speak these words of life to dying men. For Jesus said "If I be lifted up I'll draw". So we ought to lift him up , we ought to walk on the highway of righteousness, we ought to lay aside every sin and weight that so easily beset us and run with patience the race that is set before us. Yes we ought to lift him up and we ought to speak his words to dying men, we ought to tell them that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son and whosoever believe in him (not on created selves) shall not perish but have everlasting life. We ought to tell them that he came unto his own but his own received him not, but as many as received him to them he gave power. Power to walk right, power to talk right, power to live and love.

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ (not my own understanding) but on Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.

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